

raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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28-page bumper issue



Peterborough Station Quarter scheme (with western entrance) moves forward



Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

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- Accessibility at Biggleswade
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Global activity and key local bottlenecks

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A visit to Griffin Wharf

A lively visit to Liverpool Street station – [p.26](#)

Ipswich cubs and scouts enjoy a behind the scenes trip to the UK's busiest terminus

Railfuture member Tom Watts didn't get a site tour of Cambridge South station but he works next door and took this fabulous shot (below left) from the rooftop. At the same time as constructing Cambridge South station, Network Rail is also building Beaulieu Park station (near to Chelmsford), which has three platforms and is due to open in late 2025. On the photo (below right) from Network Rail, it doesn't look as nice as Cambridge South, does it? One might ask why it is so different.



In the next RAIL EAST (issue 207, September 2025) we will be asking why LNER's ticket vending machines (TVMs) sell the Anglia Plus Day Ranger (and the variants of it), but Greater Anglia's (GA) TVMs still don't sell their own ticket, despite a recent upgrade. Of course, GA could pre-empt our article by finally fixing it.

Finally, FLUA asks GTR to wash its trains. Andy Gibb took this photo of a Class 387 at Cambridge in April.



FROM THE CHAIR

BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH



As we had local elections a few weeks ago I wanted to start by saying a bit about these — not so much about the ones that were held — but rather the ones that weren't! In Norfolk and Suffolk the county council elections were postponed as the government is considering the creation of single tier authorities instead of the present two-tier counties and districts. At the same time, it's pressing ahead with plans for a joint Norfolk and Suffolk mayor. The same will apply to Essex which will have its own mayor together with single tier authorities. Why does this all matter to Railfuture?

Railfuture believes that sub-regional mayors could be a good thing because strategic transport planning, including a statutory role in the managing, planning and development of local rail services, would fall under the mayors' remit. Moreover, the mayors' jurisdictions would be large enough to attract more resources and make a bigger impact. So Railfuture supports the Norfolk and Suffolk proposal, and we responded to the government consultation accordingly. Complementing the mayors, the creation of single-tier authorities on extended boundaries such as Greater Norwich could mean a much greater engagement by local government in the provision of local rail services than is currently the case.

Of course, as long as central government controls most of the purse strings maybe we shouldn't expect too much, and there has certainly been a good deal of frustration with the Cambridge and Peterborough mayoral experience! No solution will be a panacea.

Staying with Norfolk and Suffolk, a very positive step in the right direction is the recently published Network Rail study 'Norfolk & East Suffolk Strategic Advice'. This draws on work done by the regional body, Transport East, together with Greater Anglia to consider desired expansion of rail services on Norfolk and Suffolk secondary lines, for the most part from hourly to half hourly. The report assesses the capacity of the existing infrastructure to meet these demands together with where improvements might be needed. In assessing provision of a half-hourly service on the southern section of the East Suffolk line, running trains to Leiston is considered as a possibility. An idea certainly put forward by Railfuture and others for some time now, but good to see it enter mainstream thinking. Please look at the detailed article on [page 10](#).

In Cambridgeshire news we objected to the CSET busway Transport and Works Act Order application (see <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display3961>) on two grounds – the busway represents an inadequate response to the city's transport needs and harms the prospects for a reopened rail line to Haverhill. A public inquiry is expected later in the year at which we hope to make our case, but it will be interesting to see the impact of the new Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority mayor, Paul Bristow, who during his campaign spoke out against the busway and in favour of light rail. More on this in the article on [page 21](#).

I'd like to thank everyone who attended the three branches mini-conference at Peterborough on 15 May (and those who took the trouble to express their disappointment at being unable to attend). It was great to see a full house, hear good speakers and get to network with colleagues from outside our own branch. See the report that begins on [page 4](#) for a flavour of the event. It was a very positive experience overall and huge thanks are due to Jerry Alderson for the amount of work he put in to organise this successful event. Together with this and a site visit to Cambridge South ([page 12](#)) this is the largest ever issue at 28 pages!

I hope you will be able to attend our free-to-attend meeting in Ipswich on Saturday 21 June, starting at 14:00 (address on back page). We are still waiting for confirmation of our guest speaker.

PETERBOROUGH CONFERENCE: SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

BY JERRY ALDERSON AND NICK DIBBEN

COVER STORY

Railfuture has 14 branches in Great Britain — with one in both Scotland and Wales and 12 across England. East Anglia has three neighbouring branches: London & Southeast, Lincolnshire and East Midlands, and we liaise with all of them when responding to consultations. However, their respective members tend to meet only at national Railfuture events. This 'mini-conference' at the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery on Thursday 15 May 2025 offered the chance for members in East Anglia, the East Midlands and Lincolnshire to meet one another. It was open to everyone and a few turned up from London and Yorkshire. A Thursday, rather than a Saturday, was chosen to attract more non-members and because many speakers are unavailable at the weekend.

We had five speakers, two about infrastructure (Peterborough Station Square and the Great Central Railway), two about passenger matters (train services and ticket purchasing) and a historical presentation as this is the year of Railway 200. Two female speakers had accepted the invitation, but both then had other commitments, so we ended up with an all-male line-up.



Presentations, along with links to articles and a BBC interview, can be viewed at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/?pastevent=2025/Peterborough>

Pre-meeting

Doors opened at noon so that everyone could have an informal chat with each other and the presenters, over refreshments and a light buffet.

Peter Wakefield described the progress on building Cambridge South Station which is due to open early 2026 following infrastructure work being completed over Christmas 2025. A series of more than 80 photos taken during a site visit by Railfuture and the Fen Line Users Association on 7 May were shown — see [page 12](#).

Welcome

EAST Anglia branch chair Ian Couzens welcomed people to the conference. He noted that this year was the 200th anniversary of the railways and that Peterborough was a key interchange station which offered scope for improvement.

Lewis Banks – Peterborough City Council Transport and Environment Manager – Peterborough Station Quarter

In March 2024, the previous government allocated £48m for improving the so-called Station Quarter, as part of its Levelling Up fund. The rest of the £65m will come from Peterborough City Council's Towns Fund money, and other partners such as Network Rail. A full business case had been submitted and was given the green light just a few days earlier, so the conference was perfect timing! However, funding will only be confirmed in the government's Comprehensive Spending Review on 11 June 2025. Construction on the first phase of works, 'City Link', should begin in late autumn 2025, and the full works could take around 2.5 years.

The aim of the project is to provide a clearer, safer and more welcoming pedestrian and cyclist route between the station and the city centre. Improved links would be created by work to the Queensgate roundabout and associated subways. Local businesses believe that it will improve footfall. The project will tackle issues such as congestion outside the station, improve connectivity and unlock development around the station. A new western entrance would be provided on existing railway land and include a multi-storey car park. The top image on the front cover shows the approach of the western entrance; the lower image is an aerial view with the car park in the bottom right-hand corner.

On the eastern side, a new station square would be created (right) and the existing station building refurbished and upgraded, with its entrance being moved southwards, although there would be an entrance at the northern end for people in the north of Peterborough — it would also be quick access for the neighbouring Waitrose store.



Railfuture's hope, naturally, is that rail will be seen as a more convenient way to travel— particularly if the walk is reduced from 20 minutes to five — and this should see a significant increase in use of the station. However, that means investment inside the station, which is not the council's responsibility. Peter Wakefield was interviewed by BBC journalist Shariqua Ahmed, who attended the conference. Listen to BBC radio coverage at www.railfuture.org.uk/display4015.

In response to questions (Lewis Banks on left and Jerry Alderson, conference chair, on right), Mr Banks noted that other station improvements were still to be developed and that the footbridge link to the Queensgate Centre could be improved. It was suggested that although buses would not call at the new west entrance, it should have facilities for buses used for rail replacement services. The railway, which will own the new multi-storey car park, would be responsible for the management and setting the parking charges.



More information at: <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/planning-and-development/regeneration/peterborough-station-quarter>.

Tom Ingall – Great Central Railway reunification project

People in the north of England will be familiar with Tom Ingall as a local BBC presenter, but he has spent 40 years volunteering at the Great Central Railway — “You serve less time for murder” he said, in one of several light-hearted comments in a fine-tuned and extremely professional presentation about the ambitious, and very expensive, project to link up the two heritage railways on either side of the Midland Mainline.



It is always much more difficult to reinstate something than to remove it, and as rules change, along with neighbours, a like-for-like reinstatement is not possible.

The Great Central Railway has around 29km (18 miles) of track but split into two parts and separated by around 500m of missing railway track. The reunification project aimed to connect them back together. There were seven main elements in the project, some of which had been completed:

1. New bridge over the Midland Main Line – completed in 2017
2. New bridge over the canal – completed in 2020
3. New bridge over the A60 road – completed in 2022. A thinner deck had enabled a greater clearance over the road

Outstanding work to do

4. New railway embankment
5. New bridge over Railway Terrace
6. A new urban viaduct
7. New section of double track

Planning information had been submitted and was awaiting a decision. Construction work could potentially be completed within three years although the timescales would depend on money being available. £2.5m had been banked so far. However £500,000 of that is needed to turn designs into engineering blueprints. A detailed business plan is being prepared to encourage funders. The reality for heritage railways is that they cannot make sufficient profit to fully fund major capital scheme — even if they became more commercial in capturing every penny from visitors — and whilst the two railways will be able to operate more efficiently at lower cost once fully reunified, borrowing against future savings can be risky.

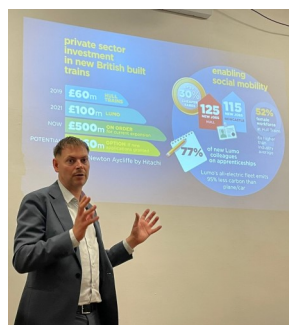


Tom Ingall (left, speaking at the conference) is heavily involved in promoting the fund raising, and is willing to give presentations about the reunification to interested groups. He does not charge for his time or travel expenses but asks for donations to the project.

Although Railfuture campaigns primarily for the rail network, light rail and metro systems, heritage railways have a positive role to play. They attract future generations to train travel, provide useful training and testing services to the 'big railway' and where they have a link to the network then there is potential for rail freight to be carried. In fact, British Rail built a link to the northern section for that very purpose and it remains connected today. Future gypsum traffic is a possibility.

There are many ways in which people can donate money towards the reinstatement, as a single amount or monthly. Full details are at www.gcrailway.co.uk/unify. Even just viewing their videos at 'GCROFFICIAL' on YouTube brings in a few pennies.

Martijn Gilbert – MD Open Access First Group



Martijn Gilbert spoke enthusiastically about First Group's two open-access operations: Hull Trains and Lumo. He said that open-access provides private sector investment into the railway, with the operator taking the commercial risk. As new operators, they can adopt new ways of working.

Hull Trains (which was created by GB Railways PLC, the owner of Anglia Railways and acquired when First Group unsuccessfully tried to win the replacement franchise that began in April 2004)

has been running for 25 years and runs 97 services per week between London and Hull using five bi-mode trains introduced in 2019. It has successfully bounced back after COVID, when it received no support from government, and now has 125 staff.

Lumo started in 2021 and runs 70 trains a week using five electric trains as a low-cost alternative to LNER. There are 105 staff.

Its London-Newcastle-Edinburgh service is a direct challenge to air travel with an average fare at 2/3 of the price of budget airlines over the same booking horizon. As rail campaigners such as Railfuture have mentioned many times, rail offers a faster journey time for city centre to city centre, with a significant advantage on productive time, whilst producing less CO2e than flying per passenger km.

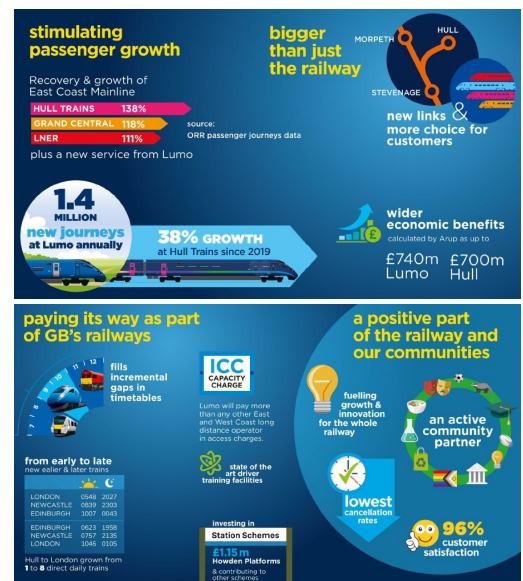
Studies have shown that open-access services helped grow the overall rail market and supported local economies (although some claims have been challenged).

New trains had been ordered to allow for new services between London and Stirling and London and Carmarthen. More trains on existing routes would be formed of 10 coaches to reflect demand, especially over the weekend.

In response to questions, challenged about revenue abstraction and "ORCATS raiding", Mr Gilbert noted that since most long-distance journeys were pre-booked on specific trains that was limited, although it kept a few seats free for passengers with any-operator tickets. Asked about inefficient use of rail capacity, First Group wants to run 10-coach trains where there is sufficient passenger demand (certain times of the day) but was not keen to run services that divided en route as this created operational risk and increased station platform occupancy, although Grand Central (GC) were planning to do this. Also, unlike GC they had no wish to stop at Peterborough (for connections to East Anglia) and he believed that Stevenage was an acceptable connection.

He said that new routes were selected where gaps in the existing rail market were identified or where there was potential for modal shift from cars or air. Sheffield to London was an example where current journeys had a high % of car trips compared with other cities.

Martijn Gilbert produced an extensive set of slides — containing numerous fascinating and detailed statistics, clearly intended to put open-access operations in a good light within a potentially hostile political environment — but did not have time to talk through all of them. The complete set can be viewed on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display4017. They make a good case — in terms of transport, economic and social benefits — for all train services, not just open-access ones.



Anthony Smith – Chair Independent Rail Retailers Group



Since privatisation in the 1990s, train tickets can be bought from third parties as well as the rail industry itself (ticket offices, on-board staff, ticket vending machines and online). In fact, before that it was possible to buy tickets through travel agents and agents that dealt with businesses. Interrail has also sold travel in Great Britain since the early 1970s, and Eurostar launched prior to private train companies replacing BR.

By far the best known — and currently the most used — third-party retailer in Britain is Trainline, which was originally setup by Virgin Trains. Despite its name, it now also sells coach trips and operates in 45 countries across Europe and Asia. Many are unaware how it has invested substantial sums in the railway. For example, it funded the installation of barcode readers at station ticket gates, which are now used with tickets sold by all operators.

The Independent Rail Retailers (IRR) was established in 2017 and Anthony Smith took over the chairmanship in January 2024, just after he left Transport Focus. It is the membership and lobbying group representing many of Britain's independent ticket retailers. It currently has 10 members that are involved in selling rail tickets.

IRR
Independent
Rail Retailers



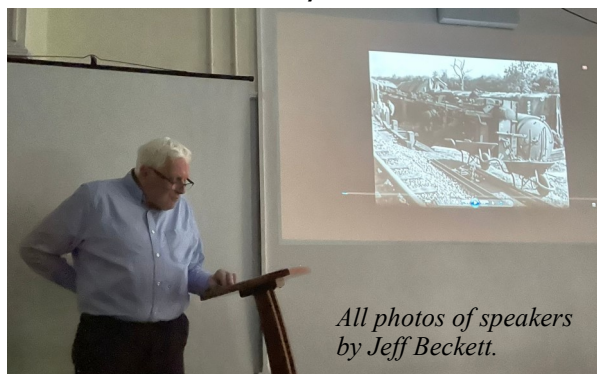
Anthony Smith did not use slides, but instead talked through various issues buying train tickets. He began with his own experience of buying a ticket to this conference. He went to his local ticket office where he knows the staff quite well. and asked for a

ticket from London to Peterborough. However, he did not notice that the staff had chosen, without asking, to sell him a cheaper ticket that was only valid on GTR trains. It proved impossible to change it whilst on route, having crossed London, as it was a different train company and they would only change tickets that they had issued. Such issues need to be addressed as the rail industry changes.

Given his role, it was unsurprising that Mr Smith considered that private sector input was essential to help grow rail travel in an efficient way. He pointed out that existing rail operators generally used systems developed by IRR members at present. The commission rate is 4.5% of the ticket price (recently lowered from 5%).

The government has said that Great British Railways (GBR) will have a website and apps to sell ticketing. However, he explained that competition law means that GBR must operate its retailing as a separate operation without subsidy. It must surely find a way to operate profitably without introducing booking fees. The details and clarity of any future system were important. GBR will need to work with the independent retailers and be prepared to share data.

In response to questions, Mr Smith noted that expansion of contactless travel would extract from on-line sales but was not suitable for most long-distance journeys. Asked whether booking fees could be abolished, he felt that the small extra cost was not important to most passengers — they did not care who the train operator was or who they brought their tickets from, as they just wanted a simple system and a good journey. He did warn, however, that ticket simplification means increased fares — be careful what you wish for.

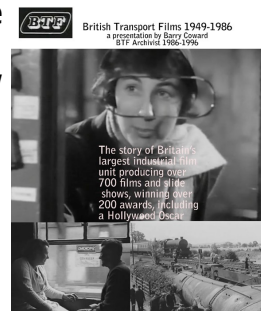


Barry Coward – BTF archivist 1986-1996

British Transport Films (BTF) was set up after WW2 to highlight the work of the British Transport Commission. The first film was released in 1950. Most films were 15-20 minutes long and were generally in three categories: staff training, promoting new development or travelogues.

Extracts from several films were shown including: re-

railing a locomotive using hydraulic jacks, day in the life of a station litter bin, the new Midland and Birmingham Pullman services and the work of rail and bus staff in South Wales.



All speakers were presented with rail-themed cufflinks. Martijn Gilbert says that he wore them that evening at a Women in Rail event in London!

MARK WALKER PROVIDES FOOD FOR THOUGHT AT RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIA 2025 AGM

BY PETER FEENEY

Mark Walker, CEO of the consultancy Cogitamus, spoke at Railfuture East Anglia's AGM in Bury St Edmunds on 22 February 2025. In keeping with the name of his business, Mark offered a thought-provoking overview of rail policy past and present, outlining the previous government's approach to rail reform before looking in some detail at what the current government has done to date – and what is likely to emerge in the coming months.



In an impressively even-handed talk, he identified some of the big challenges facing the current government in the context of transport. The biggest may well prove to be a potential tension between two of the government's stated "missions" – economic growth whilst stressing the drive for green energy and zero carbon. Recognizing the speed with which some aspects of rail policy reform had already been passed into law (even if the proponent of "Move fast & fix things" was no longer Secretary of State), Mark also drew attention to some of the mixed messages in policy to date. So, alongside very early announcements from the Department for Transport (DfT) in the summer of 2024 cancelling some big ticket road schemes in southern England proposed by the previous administration (including the A303 Stonehenge by-pass) and Treasury confirmation that both East West Rail and the Trans Pennine Upgrade would be fully funded, there was environmentally contentious and deeply controversial support for a third Heathrow runway and the Lower Thames Crossing project. Both hugely expensive and anything but carbon neutral – hard not to see signs of mixed messaging.

And then there is Great British Railways (GBR). Mark summarised key features of the proposed "directing mind" as set out in the DfT's February 2025 consultation document. As well as taking on overall management of former franchises/direct contracts as operations return to public ownership, GBR will also be responsible for strategic management of freight operations and any open-access passenger operators. He noted that the new government appeared to want to construct GBR out of the existing structures of Network Rail – and asked how well placed NR was to help achieve this. An obvious potential tension could be between GBR/DfT and the increasing body of devolved authorities in England – not least in East Anglia, where three existing county council areas are now in line for reorganisation. Directly elected mayors were certain to demand additional powers to integrate local rail services alongside buses and trams. How would the national directing mind function harmoniously with a variety of regional minds addressing perceived local priorities?

Mark noted as an aside that three key words seemed largely absent from the consultation document – "innovation", "technology" and "funding". It's conceivable that the omissions may be quite significant.

Responding to questions from the AGM audience, Mark held out little prospect for any further levelling out of costs to drivers and rail users. His informed view is that any government looking to secure a second term is very unlikely to take on the motoring lobby, either through short term adjustments to fuel duty (frozen, remember, since 2010) or via the nuclear option of road charging.

So, now we are over three months on from Mark's presentation, what has changed in terms of the bigger picture for rail? As RAIL EAST goes to print, we have had the chancellor's March statement, with its "warfare not welfare" spending decisions, and are close to discovering what is in the much awaited early summer capital spending review. Whilst there has been a re-affirmation of government investment in major northern infrastructure improvements, the picture for rail elsewhere seems uncertain in an increasingly challenging economic climate. Let's hope that the June spending review announcement brings greater clarity about the scale of future rail investment – and some notion of where that investment will be made.

View his slides at www.railfuture.org.uk/display3960.

NETWORK RAIL LOOKS AHEAD: NORFOLK & EAST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC ADVICE

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Railfuture has noted with pleasure how strongly passenger growth has returned to the East Anglian network. However, we have recently campaigned for even better train services on the basis that too many of our population are unable to access the railway because stations have just an hourly service or stations are too remote from new growth or car parks, bus links, active travel routes are not available. There are aspirations to improve all aspects of access as described, but the cooperation between local authorities, developers and “the railway” is very hit and miss.



It is therefore good to report that Network Rail Anglia has recently published a document (front page pictured above) that shows “the railway” positively thinking aloud with its “Norfolk & East Suffolk Strategic Advice — Railway improvement options for the Norfolk and East Suffolk branch lines” (April 2025) “to identify how future aspirations for the rail network across Norfolk and East Suffolk could be met. The study covers a geographic area including Norwich to Sheringham, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Cambridge; and Ipswich to Lowestoft and Felixstowe.”

This is a well written, well-presented and thoughtful document, with much data being shared with us, including information from the train operators Greater Anglia and East Midlands Railway. Note that the document does not address services on the Great Eastern Mainline (GEML) through Norfolk nor the Ipswich-Cambridge service on the Mid-Anglia route.

Local authorities, the train operators and advocacy groups such as Railfuture all recognise that to attract more people onto rail a minimum of two trains an hour are needed on all routes. The report doesn’t argue against any aspiration but analyses, at a fairly high level, infrastructure capacity and what needs to be done to overcome any problems identified. To back up the aspirations for more frequent services the authors helpfully give the results of a similar route to many of ours, by showing the success of capacity works between Truro and Falmouth in Cornwall – leading to some measurable modal shift from road to rail.

Each route is analysed, with the Cambridge to Norwich service identified as the one which should be tackled first to get a minimum of 2tph throughout the day. The numbers of tickets sold for the end-to-end journey are given but revealing is the close to one million journeys made each year between Ely and Cambridge stations. The Norwich-Cambridge hourly service joins three other trains per hour on that section of the overall route to give a near metro-like service that demonstrates the way frequency draws in users when they do not have to consult a timetable.

Potential speed increases – speed is important but it is not straightforward...

The report’s Core Findings:

“Improvements to line speeds could bring about improvements on some routes in the shorter-term, however feasibility into whether it would be practical or affordable to achieve the journey time savings outlined in the section has not been possible within this study. Based on analysis undertaken, the following summary can be made for each of the routes, on the next page.

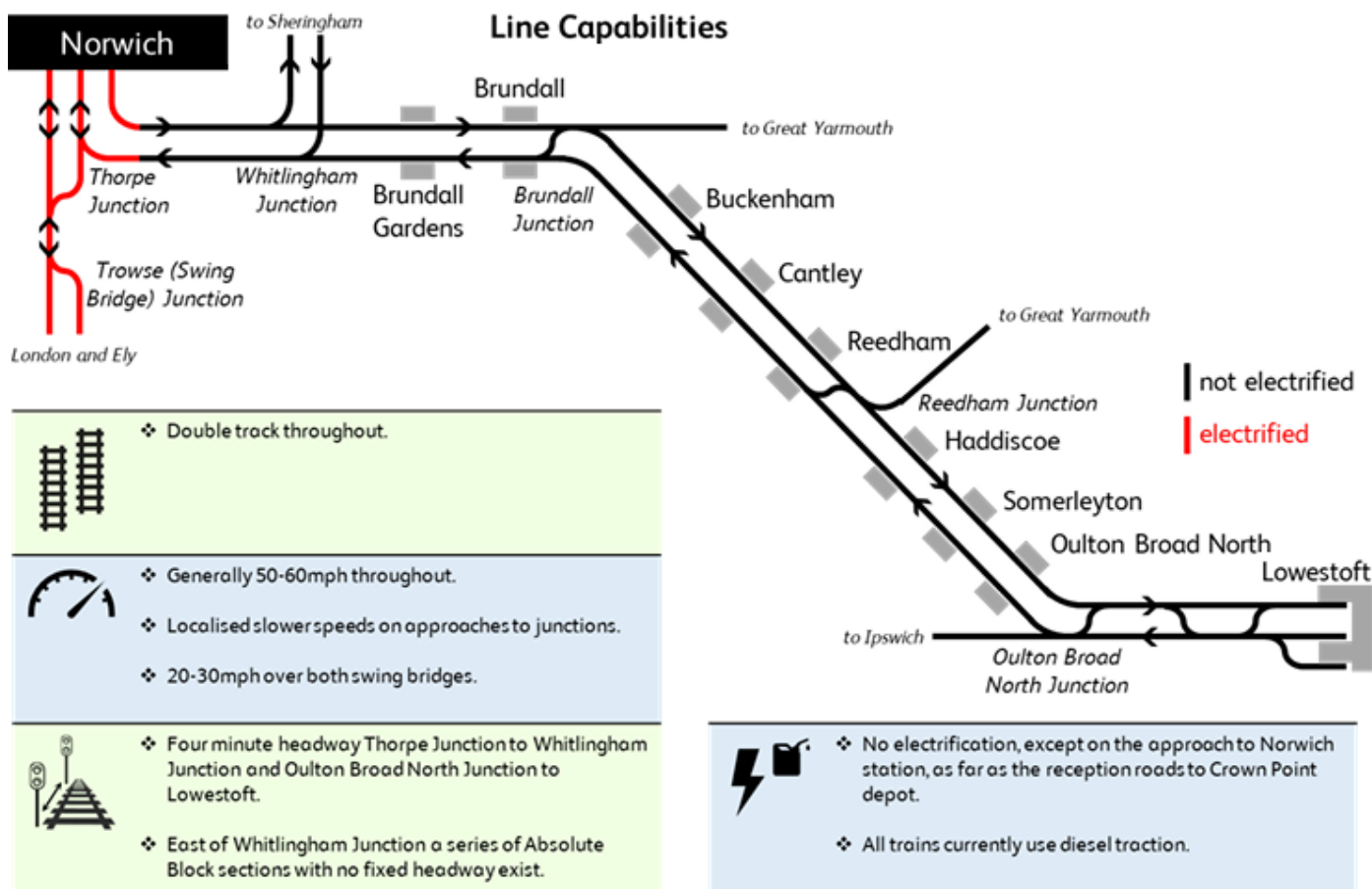
- Norwich <> Cambridge – likely to be challenging to integrate journey time improvements with busy infrastructure at both ends without also impacting other trains.
- Norwich <> Sheringham – line speeds, especially north of North Walsham could be raised in order to deliver an all-stations service.
- Norwich <> Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft – potential to review both routes together to assess cumulative benefits from improvements on shared infrastructure west of Brundall Junction.
- Ipswich <> Lowestoft – no short-term journey time benefits possible due to fixed passing points. Further doubling of the line required if journey time improvements were made.
- Ipswich <> Felixstowe – already benefits from good journey times, with only minor gains possible. Any gains potentially constrained by needing to fit between freight services, including on single line sections."

What the Report doesn't mention is the need for additional stations to make the railway more accessible — but almost accidentally it *does* reveal what happens if we do judiciously insert a new station. Cambridge North is now eight years old with a continuously fast growing footfall... currently close to 1.4 million passengers a year. The report shows that in 2024 approximately 200,015 journeys were made just up the line to Cambridge "Central" and around 90,000 down it to Ely. None of these journeys would have been possible if the new station wasn't there. Cambridge will open another new station in early 2026. Footfall to it from every station in the region will rocket. Using these figure as case studies is why we believe new stations are needed in at least two locations around the edge of Norwich.

A follow up article later in 2025 will explore in more detail the Report's specific recommendations for East Norfolk/Suffolk services.

This study has a huge amount of useful information— looking in detail at each route with footfall figures, track diagrams and passenger service provision— presented in an easy-to-read format. View it at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display4010>.

The following graphic from page 63 (of 78) shows the Norwich to Lowestoft route.



CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION SITE VISIT ON 7 MAY 2025 WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO NETWORK RAIL AND MURPHY BY JERRY ALDERSON (WITH MARK COLLINS & TONY COLLINS OF FLUA)

The Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) asked Network Rail (NR) for an 'access all areas' (within reason) tour of Cambridge South station before it opened to the public, and were delighted when given the opportunity on 7 May 2025. Railfuture members Peter Wakefield and Jerry Alderson, who are also members of FLUA, also attended. Our hosts, Network Rail (particularly Stephen Dearville) and Murphy were generous with their time.

The first thing to say is that although it was eight months before the planned opening of the station in January 2026, it was a lot further along than the visit Railfuture had to Cambridge North in February 2017, just three months before the station opened. Actually the contractors will be leaving the site in October, but trains will not call until the signalling works have been completed over Christmas 2025. However, it would be a good idea, surely, if the railway held an open day (or two) for the public to visit it — it's quite common in other European countries — and as well as the good publicity it provides a chance for railway staff to get to know the station and perhaps identify some simple things that could be improved or fixed before it formally opens. Perhaps a few trains could call at the station that day as well.

Anyone familiar with Railfuture in the past will know that a station to serve Addenbrooke's hospital has been a priority campaign since the 1980s. Sadly, the chance for it to be part of a cross-city link from St Ives has been lost. However, the arrival of the enormous Biomedical Campus should have seen a station years ago.

Railfuture believes that the new station will be used by far more passengers than the government's discredited modelling tool calculated, which inevitably means that it has been built down to a price dictated by the Treasury through its dreaded Minimum Viable Product (MVP) requirement. But let's not be negative — this really is a quite impressive station and it will be far better than the wildest dreams of anyone in the 1990s and perhaps even 20 years ago. Of course, as technology advances and the competition moves forward, passenger expectations are always increasing and this review considers whether they will all be met. Spoilers: no, not all of them!

The passenger numbers predicted for 'South' are three times those of 'North' so it is a much larger station, and it has cost four times as much (although much of that is down to the substantial track work, but far less than Railfuture wanted, or Network Rail had originally intended, and re-work will be required for East West Rail).



Our tour of the station itself began from the western entrance, having walked past the area where bicycle racks will be installed.

We hope that the existence of two entrances here — and soon to be at Peterborough — helps make the case for an eastern entrance at Cambridge 'Central' station. For large stations multiple entrances should be standard.

Railfuture spoke to the Network Rail sponsors for this station both prior to COVID (in person at Cambridge) and during it (by Teams) to stress what we thought was needed at the station. This one-to-one approach was more effective than our written response to the consultation issued by Cambridgeshire County Council about Cambridge North.

Because we expected the station to be used by many ill and elderly people going to the various hospitals at the site, we called for maximum accessibility and particularly asked for two lifts to every platform (shown in the photo, below) so that the risk of a lift being out of order did not make that platform inaccessible. We got that, and it was pleasing to see all of the lifts installed and being tested by the engineers (inset).



Toilet provision seems reasonable (accessible toilets are on both sides of the station) although there is no 'changing places' facility. Greater Anglia is proud of its introduction at Ely, and more recently at Great Yarmouth, so why not at a larger brand-new station? It should be said that there was criticism about the lack of this facility back in 2017 when Cambridge North opened.

The toilets are more substantial than Cambridge North. One assumes that the gents will be on one side and ladies on the other in this photo.



The design of the station is such that ticket gates prevent entry beyond the entrance, which may be an issue for toilets, as at Cambridge North (staff there are

generally trusting but as the station building is much smaller it is easier to monitor people). This could mean that someone coming from the western side who needs to buy a ticket from staff might need to cross the railway using the guided busway bridge and then enter via the eastern entrance in order to speak to staff.

The photo below of the eastern entrance appears to show a ticket office with two wide windows on the right-hand-side as you enter. However, Greater Anglia (GA), which will manage the station, says there will be no traditional ticket office. This is understandable given how few people buy from a ticket window these days (thanks to TVMs, contactless and smartphone apps) but what about other transactions such as restricted tickets and obtaining refunds? Where will that happen?



Protection from the rain and wind is important. The cycle parking area is covered on both sides of the station, and on the eastern side it provides a continuous canopy from the road to the station entrance, which is excellent. However, it is disappointing that the canopy on the platforms covers only less than half of the platform length — fine for short trains or if you are alighting, but if it is a 12-car train to London and you want to be at front on the train (for alighting quickly when arriving) then there is no protection — no shelter or even seating beyond the canopies appeared to be planned.



The photo on the right, taken from the island platform evacuation exit footbridge at the southern end shows just how long the platforms are and how much new track has been laid. From here, you can barely see the canopy end, never mind the building. Both outer platforms have a ramp for any wheelchair users.



All of the structures of the station building have been completed, but there was a lot of fitting-out still to be done. Flooring, stair handrails, some internal walls, toilet facilities doors etc. were still to be installed, along with some of the lighting. The gate-lines, ticket machines and so on were outstanding, as were the doors. On the platforms the masts for speakers were in place, but not the lights and CCTV. None of the information screens had been installed. There was enough to see to make a good judgement on what it will be like — below are the considered thoughts of the Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) representatives written just after the tour.

FLUA was impressed by:

- lightness and airiness of the entrances (although the open gaps between the glazing panels upstairs, and above the footbridge glazing might make it a bit too airy in bad weather)
- high-quality wood in the roof spaces (shipped in from Germany)
- solar panels (canopies are made from integrated solar panel roof sections)
- green roofs / planting (they hope it gets watered properly)
- space for a ticket office with wide windows — but how is it going to be used?
- proper Sheffield hoops for parking cycles (they need to be concreted in properly)
- two lifts to a platform and good platform canopies, but not long enough
- generators provide back-up for lifts and retail units if there's a power failure.

FLUA's concerns included:

- no provision for parking cargo bikes. This is a real problem at Cambridge "Central" station and needs addressing. Ideally on both sides there should be a designated cargo bike and trailer space, with several low (i.e. ankle-height) rails. Such rails are no good to normal bike users, which will stop these spaces being 'poached' by people with standard cycles
- the discussion going on between NR and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority about having no cycle troughs is worrying. Even if both lifts are in use, properly designed troughs are needed. Some people will carry bikes up on their shoulders anyway, but troughs would reduce the number doing that, and cycles on shoulders is not really good for other passengers on the stairs.
- FLUA thinks the project team did not realise just how many people will be using this station with a bike, and fear that the pessimistic passenger estimates may result in inadequate provision. There appeared to be no secure cycle area.

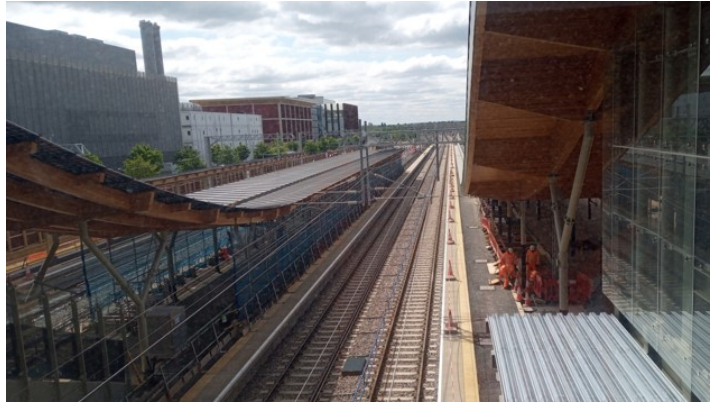
Although not relevant to the passenger experience, FLUA was interested in how such a project was planned and executed. They noted the following:

- excellent canteen and welfare facilities on site (FLUA made use of them)
- huge amount of office space for planners, quantity surveyors, designers etc. (shared facility for Cambridge South and Beaulieu Park)
- up to 200 on-site staff during possessions
- diversion of water main was required prior to construction work beginning
- quality parts sourced from the best suppliers (prefabricated platform facings sections for southern footbridge shipped from Ireland)
- As part of the planning process, the Biomedical Campus raised concerns about the effect on sensitive medical equipment from vibration during construction work and potential interference when the additional OLE is energised (although the Network Rail hosts couldn't comment on this 'political' issue, Railfuture and FLUA felt this 'fear' was excessive — if it was such a risk why did they choose to build so close to an operational railway?)

More photos of Cambridge South (and other projects) can be viewed on the FLUA website at https://www.flua.org.uk/picture_library/index.html. See next page for some more images for the site visit.

Jerry Alderson writes: FLUA is an excellent rail user group. I've been a member for 26 years and I urge rail users between Cambridge and King's Lynn to join it. This year is their 40th anniversary and they have some special events for members.

Visit www.flua.org.uk to find out more.



LONDON KING'S CROSS – THE UK'S MOST DANGEROUS PLACE? OR THE UK'S MOST OVERPROTECTIVE STATION?

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

Have you ever waited for a train at King's Cross? If so, you've probably experienced the relentless bombardment of safety announcements that make it feel less like a station and more like a dystopian experiment in public anxiety.

Here is an example from some weeks ago when my train from King's Cross to Cambridge was cancelled, so I had extra time immersed in the announcements as I awaited the next service:

2148 *There is CCTV at this station for safety*
2149 *Hold onto the handrail on the escalators*
2150 *Mind the gap between the train and platform*
2150 *LNER train doors will close 2 mins before departure*
2151 *No cycling or skateboarding*
2153 *No smoking*
2155 *Keep a close eye on luggage and report anything suspicious*
2156 *2200 LNER service to Newcastle (yes, finally a train announcement)*
2156 *Mind the gap between the train and platform*
2157 *Use lifts if carrying heavy luggage*
2157 *Hold onto the handrail on the escalators*
2158 *Mind the gap between the train and platform (yes, 3rd time in the last 8 mins)*
2159 *2209 Great Northern service to Ely*

To summarise: in just 11 minutes on the station concourse, I heard 11 safety announcements – three reminding me to 'Mind the Gap'. Meanwhile, only two announcements were about trains. Then I joined the train, and it started again:

2207 *This is the train to Ely*
2207 *See it, Say it, Sorted*
2207 *There are safety posters in every carriage*
2209 *Train to Ely*
2209 *See it, Say it, Sorted*

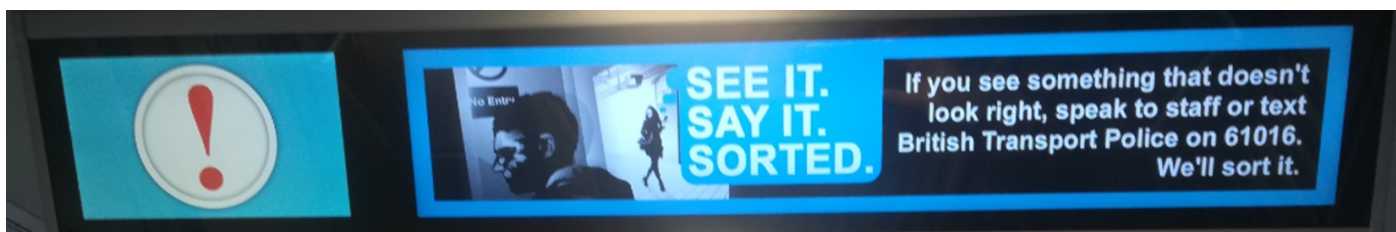
I don't know anywhere else where there is such a verbal assault – buses, bus stations, airports – nowhere comes remotely close. Are railway stations so much more dangerous? Do these announcements make much difference to public safety? Or is this just another case of over-cautious bureaucracy drowning out common sense and covering the rail industry's back?

At this rate, the only announcement they're missing is: 'Warning: excessive safety messages may cause passengers to lose their minds. Travel with caution.'

Railfuture would be interested to hear RAIL EAST readers' views on train and station announcements – excessive or about right? Is a sensible balance captured between safety reminders and practical information about services? Email raileast@railfuture.org.uk. Photo below of non-audible message on GTR class 700.



Photo by Jerry Alderson



HOUSING AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Thank you to those who responded to the appeal we made in RAIL EAST issue 205 for information on housing developments near your station. Windfall sites, like the one mentioned below at Kentford in Suffolk (Kennett station) that are outside the local plan, are often difficult to pick up. Please keep the information coming in.

Kennett: in an effort to get a standard hourly service on the Mid-Anglia route, Kennett station has been mentioned several times over the last few issues as more housing is being built close by, visible from the trains that race past.

In a hearing held on 26 March 2025, and against the West Suffolk District Council's (WSDC) wishes, the High Court has ruled in favour of a developer plan to fill a "windfall" brown field site with 900 homes at Kentford, which is within 1km of Kennett station. We note that developer has not referenced the station at all nor offered to develop it with better car parking or with any active travel links. Hopefully, WSDC belatedly will get some S106 money to do so.

This latest development brings the population within a 3km radius of Kennett station to approximately 10,000 people. The case for a standard hourly stopping pattern throughout the day seems very hard to challenge.

Cambridge North: currently around 22,000 people live within a 3km radius of this station. The news that the government has given approval for the closure of the nearby sprawling sewage farm and its removal to a new site in a more rural location to the northeast (Honey Hill), means that the long planned new suburb of **Hartree** will go ahead. Some 5,600 new homes will be built as well as the creation of 6,000 jobs. This planning approval is in addition to that also announced for the area of land a little closer to the station.

The "**Cambridge North Development**", which is to be built largely on disused former railway land, will deliver over 400 homes and thousands of new jobs.

This development is jointly sponsored by Network Rail, DB Cargo and Brookgate. In 2024, the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) had given approval of the plans as railway owned land is involved, thus enabling the development to go forward to planning committee. The plans are since approved.



Photo by Peter Wakefield

The current Cambridge North station surface car park (above) has 428 spaces, most of which are in use each day as the station has become a railhead for a wide area. ORR refers to the multi-storey replacement car park as a "mobility hub".

The ORR issued a lengthy response to the land disposal, which you may find a worthwhile read here: <https://search.app/BUcDJEyvt4k8vtEZ7>.

The ORR approval in part reads:

A new 725 space mobility hub and two laboratory buildings will be constructed on the disposal application site which is currently in use as the existing station surface car park. 622 of these spaces to be provided for rail users, re-providing the existing 428 surface car parking spaces, and accommodating a further 194 spaces for future growth. The quantum of additional of car parking was discussed by Abellio Greater Anglia (AGA)(Station Franchise Operator) with DfT who were supportive. Importantly, the opportunity to increase the station car parking in isolation of a comprehensive masterplan was considered to be very limited. AGA (SFO) have been party to all discussions and Station Change has been approved by DfT.

The proposed scheme will unlock land and drive infrastructure and investment growth, building on the momentum created by the Station development and the hotel and office permissions. It will also act as an initial catalyst for regeneration of the wider NE Cambridge Area including the potential relocation and redevelopment of the waste water works

The wider scheme will provide a new Network Rail maintenance compound and track access point on retained Network Rail land.

When all this is completed, the number of people living within 3km of the station will be in the region of 40,000 to 50,000. The number of jobs within the same radius will be approximately 18,000.

An impression produced by the developers of the Cambridge North scheme, taken from the ORR website.

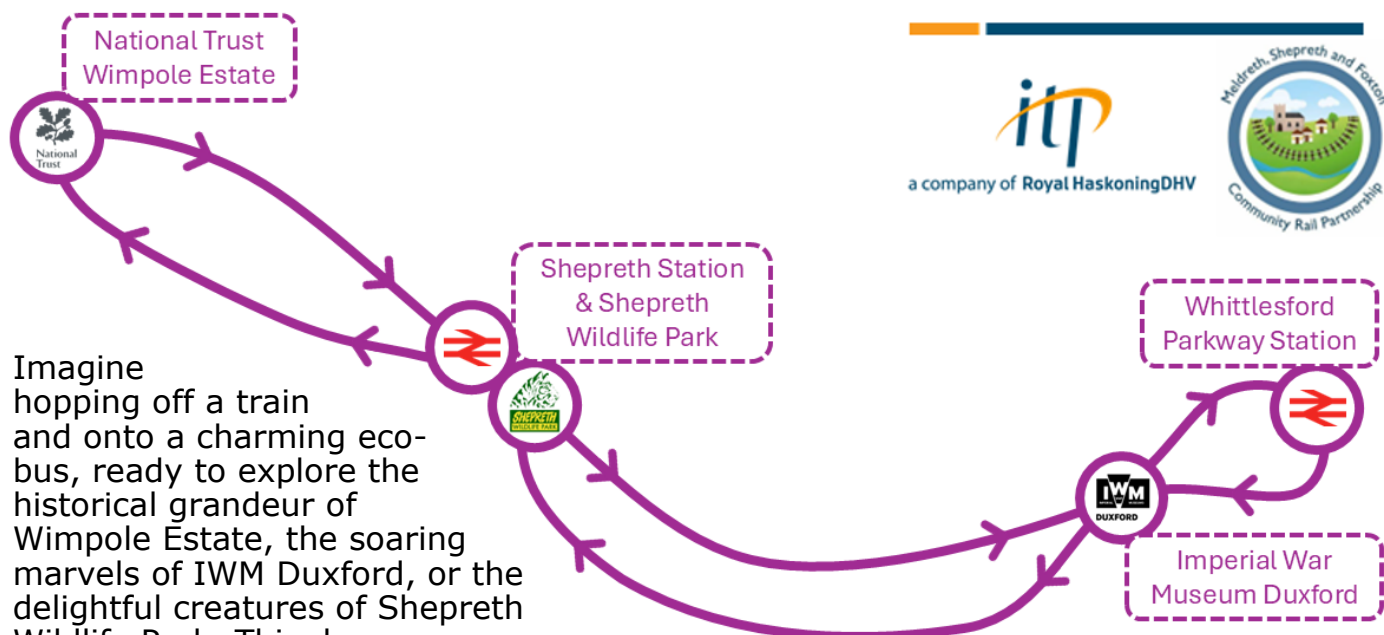
The development has its own website at <https://cambridgenorth.co.uk/>.



Thanks to Vince Christie who has provided some very old editions of RAIL EAST and enabled us to fill a few more gaps on our archive. We're only missing nine for the last 30 years (including one from 2003 and three from 2004) but none before 1986. If you can help, please contact Peter Wakefield (see back page).

CONNECTING TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: AN UPDATE

BY SARAH GROVE



Imagine hopping off a train and onto a charming eco-bus, ready to explore the historical grandeur of Wimpole Estate, the soaring marvels of IWM Duxford, or the delightful creatures of Shepreth Wildlife Park. This dream was explored in a feasibility study for a sustainable tourism bus service for South Cambs.

Spearheaded by the Meldreth, Shepreth, and Foxton Community Rail Partnership, and funded by the Community Rail Development Fund and the SCDC Green to our Core Fund, this ambitious project aims to bridge the gap between popular tourist attractions and local train stations, namely Shepreth and Whittlesford Parkway. The study, conducted by transport consultants ITP (www.itpworld.net/), delves into the potential for an eco-tourism bus service to not only enhance visitor experiences but also promote sustainable travel and boost the local economy.

The region boasts a rich tapestry of attractions, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. Wimpole Estate, with its sprawling 2,500-acre landscape and historical mansion, attracts around 360,000 visitors. IWM Duxford, a renowned air museum, welcomed 381,650 visitors in 2023. Shepreth Wildlife Park, a family favourite, sees around 100,000 visitors each year. However, a significant hurdle remains: the vast majority of visitors, particularly to Wimpole Estate, arrive by car.

The study identified a clear need for improved public transport access. While Shepreth Wildlife Park enjoys proximity to its namesake station, the other attractions are more reliant on private vehicles. Wimpole Estate is 5 miles from Shepreth and poorly served by buses. The 75 bus service from Cambridge drops off passengers at Arrington (1 mile from Wimpole) or Orwell (2 miles from Wimpole) twice a day Monday to Saturday. IWM Duxford is 1.7 miles from Whittlesford Parkway, and while this 40 minute walk may be manageable for some, the route is along, and involves crossing, the very busy A505. It is slightly better served with buses; service 7a operates once per day to Heathfield in each direction from Trumpington – Thriplow via Whittlesford and Sawston and service 132 visits the car park of the site on Sundays and bank holidays only, 4 times per day from Cambridge, and 5 times per day from Saffron Walden via Great Chesterford Station, Sawston and Trumpington. The proposed bus service aims to offer a greener alternative for tourists arriving from Cambridge and London by rail.

Discussions with local transport providers, including train and bus operators, revealed both enthusiasm and challenges. Stagecoach East deemed a traditional bus service commercially unviable due to the rural nature of the area. Instead, a pilot shuttle service has emerged as a promising solution. This service, potentially using electric minibuses, would operate during peak tourist seasons, connecting the train stations to the key attractions.

The feasibility study meticulously analysed population demographics, train station usage, and existing transport services. Whittlesford Parkway, a bustling hub for commuters heading to London, contrasts sharply with the quieter Shepreth station. The study also highlighted the importance of accessibility for all, noting the need for improved station facilities, such as lifts, and addressing the travel disparities faced by disabled individuals.

To ensure the pilot service's success, a robust marketing strategy is crucial. The study suggests exploring combined fare products with train operators, leveraging social media, and highlighting the convenience and environmental benefits of the bus service. Learning from successful initiatives elsewhere, such as Blenheim Palace's free shuttle and the National Trust's train travel incentives, will be key.

While challenges like free parking at attractions and potential weather dependency exist, the potential benefits are undeniable. A well-executed eco-bus service could transform the tourist experience in South Cambridgeshire, encouraging sustainable travel, supporting local businesses, and fostering a more connected community.

The full report can be found on the MSFCRP website: <https://bit.ly/msfcrpbus>. Like the Network Rail report mentioned on page 11, this is coincidentally also 78 pages long and contains a wealth of information.

The author is Project Officer, Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership.

RAILFUTURE OPPOSES CAMBRIDGE SOUTH EAST TRANSPORT (CSET) BUSWAY PLAN

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

Railfuture East Anglia has lodged a formal objection to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) Transport and Works Act Order for the Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) scheme. We warn that the plans could undermine key sustainable transport objectives and hurt existing public transport services in the region.

RAIL EAST readers will be aware of CSET and Railfuture's longstanding opposition. The CSET project involves a new busway and Park & Ride facility near the A11, which aims to shift car users onto buses. However, Railfuture is concerned that by concentrating resources on the Park & Ride, the scheme risks undermining bus services that already serve long-distance routes, such as those between Cambridge, Haverhill, and Linton. By prioritising car access to the city, the scheme may fail to address the needs of those who rely on public transport for their entire journey.

Furthermore, Railfuture points out that the new plans are at odds with GCP's own City Access programme, which seeks to reduce car usage and improve air quality in the city. The original CSET proposals, which focused on modest measures such as bus priority along the A1307 and better cycling infrastructure, aligned far more closely with the principles of sustainable transport. Railfuture is concerned that the new scheme – with its reliance on Park & Ride – could actually reinforce car dependency rather than reducing it.

In addition, Railfuture continues to advocate for the reopening of the Cambridge to Haverhill railway line. A rail-based solution would provide greater capacity than the proposed busway, reduce environmental impact, and offer long-term connectivity for Haverhill, one of the largest towns in the UK still without a rail link. Reopening the railway has the potential to better meet growing demand for sustainable transport, with a recent study indicating that the rail line could support as many as 2,000 daily peak-time journeys, which the proposed busway would struggle to accommodate.

In the short term, Railfuture calls on the GCP to return to the original vision of CSET, focusing on more modest improvements to bus services and active travel along the A1307. Both the local authorities and Department for Transport are urged to seriously consider the benefits of reopening the Cambridge to Haverhill railway, which would help deliver a truly sustainable transport solution for the region.

PROGRESS ON STEP-FREE ACCESS AT BIGGLESWADE

BY PETER WAKEFIELD (INCLUDING ALL PHOTOS)

Biggleswade station, on the East Coast Mainline, serves a thriving town of some 23,000 people and is doubtless the railhead for many more. The footfall at the station rose by 5% in 2023/24 to 789,284. However, it has no ticket gates and is unstaffed after 14.00, so actual volumes are probably much higher. The official figures are still well short of the pre-COVID numbers — a phenomenon common to many previously busy London commuter stations.

Currently, access to the four platform faces is via a footbridge that launches from the west-side street level station buildings high above the 4 tracks. Walking east over the tracks, you first reach the steps down to Peterborough-bound platforms (3 & 4) and a few metres on a second set lead down to the London-bound platforms 1 & 2. The bridge carries on to the suburbs lining the east side of the station and thus an eastern station entrance. It also doubles as a public footpath over the station platforms to the town centre, which is just beyond the west side range of buildings.

As we have previously indicated (see RAIL EAST issue 198, June 2023, p.22), the new bus interchange in the station forecourt is now open with buses using it. It was planned and built by Mid Beds Council from its own budget and extra resource provided by Homes England's Housing Infrastructure Fund.



The next stage of making this an accessible, step-free to all platforms station, is now finally underway with the start of construction of a new footbridge with lifts to all four platforms.

It is funded by the Department for Transport's Access for All Fund. The site is a difficult one, as the two relatively narrow island platforms are isolated from the streets above partly in a wide shallow cutting that has hundreds of trains racing through it all day, as well many stopping services. To overcome this difficult, complicated worksite, a temporary scaffold bridge had to be built to enable the builders to get materials across the tracks to the work sites on the platforms. This is now under construction.



The project includes improved and secure cycle parking and accessible toilets with baby change facility. We again assume that the entrance to the new bridge and lifts will be accessed by way of ticket gates that will have staff in attendance during the times trains call. On our recent visit the waiting rooms on platforms 1 & 2 were locked out of use at 14.00, as were the toilets. The station was still busy with users on a very cold windy day. There were several complaints made about the facilities locked away. It is odd that access to the running lines is currently very easy with no staff around at 14.00.



View north towards the current footbridge in the far distance. In the foreground the temporary bridge connecting both the platform safe work spaces (behind the white hoarding) with the materials and machinery space on the left.



Close up of the temporary shaft to bring work staff and materials to a safe working space. Passenger trains pass the site on the centre tracks very frequently and at very high speed. Very long and heavy freight trains pass by on the outside tracks frequently at full line speed... the dust flies!



View south from the station footbridge across the materials and work compound and the temporary bridge to the platform work sites. All evidence that the historic railway is difficult (and thus expensive) to bring up to modern access standards

If Biggleswade station is to become a proper travel hub, staff must be available from beginning of service to end to ensure waiting rooms, toilets, are kept open and the platforms kept safe.

On the subject of footbridges, Greater Anglia has announced that the innovative footbridge to be installed at Stowmarket station will be open by the end of the year, rather than early summer, because of delays in the manufacturing process.

BOXED IN BY PHIL SMART

This article looks at how recent moves in global shipping strengthen the case for improvements at Ely and Haughley junction.

Readers may be aware that since RAIL EAST issue 205 (February 2025) there has been a shift within the shipping alliances that have had an impact on calling patterns at the UK's major ports. These alliances are voluntary collaborations between the various shipping lines that individually do not enjoy monopolies on global routes but by joining forces, manage to maintain a degree of competition with companies in rival alliances. These alliances have been in place since 2017, but from 2025 some of the companies find themselves with new partners.

The following table summarises the former and current groupings.

| 2017 | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------------|
| 2M Alliance | Ocean Alliance | THE Alliance | |
| MSC Maersk | CMA CGM Cosco OOCL Evergreen | ONE Hapag Lloyd Yang Ming HMM | |
| 2025 | | | |
| Gemini Alliance | Ocean Alliance | Premier Alliance | Independent |
| Maersk Hapag Lloyd | CMA CGM Cosco OOCL Evergreen | ONE Yang Ming HMM | MSC |

As you can see, not much to excite the gossip columnists. Mediterranean Shipping Co (MSC) has left Maersk to work on its own and Hapag Lloyd has taken its place in partnership with Maersk.

The significant development as far as Felixstowe is concerned is that Maersk has moved its alliance business to London Gateway, though retaining some of its non-alliance business at the Suffolk port. London Gateway is owned by Dubai Ports (DP World) which also has a joint interest with Associated British Ports (ABP) in the port of Southampton. Felixstowe, London Gateway and Southampton, due to their size, location and berthing capacity, have between them cornered the market with these East Asia shipping lines.

What does this mean for rail freight? The UK has never had a ports policy. If you were going to choose where to place a major port, based on capacity of the rail network, then you would probably not pick the north Thames. However, the prevailing philosophy has been to leave everything to the market and developers probably have other considerations on their minds when selecting suitable sites for investment. The transfer of the Maersk business to London Gateway has had little impact on the overall movement of maritime containers (known as 'boxes') by rail. Of the 38 trains per day that ran from Felixstowe, 15 went via London and the remaining 23 via Ely. Some eight of these North London paths are now used by trains from London Gateway to follow the Maersk traffic. As before, the North London Line is full. DP World is investing in another rail terminal within the London Gateway port but this will not result in further trains in and out of the port, though it may offer the port some operational flexibility. Any further market growth will have to go by road, with no further modal shift to rail currently possible!

So, what will happen at Felixstowe? Hot on the heels of the announcement about shipping alliances, came the news that Hutchison (based in Singapore) intends to sell a majority stake in its ports division to Black Rock, an American based company which also owns MSC – who themselves have recently acquired Maritime, a haulage company also running rail terminals in the Midlands.



Photo by Phil Smart taken at the Port of Felixstowe on 14 March 2025

If this move brings more investment to Felixstowe, what form will it take? If it attracts another shipping line or grows the business with the lines already using the port, again it will have to go by road. There is no spare capacity to route trains via London and, until we sort out the junctions at Ely and Haughley, no more capacity via Peterborough either. Even as this article was being prepared came news that Hapag-Lloyd were moving the UK call on their South America to Europe service from London Gateway to Felixstowe.

All this puts the government in something of a dilemma. It has a declared intention of increasing the volume of goods carried by rail by 75% by 2050. To achieve that overall growth, the maritime intermodal market will need to double if other sectors remain static. With two thirds of deep sea container ports trapped behind capacity constrained junctions in London and at Ely, the need for investment at the latter has never been more urgent.

On top of all this comes the global uncertainty created by recent announcements and counter-announcements emanating from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, aka the White House, with China showing little sign of backing down on what looks like becoming a trade war with the US. One possible consequence of this is that more goods from East Asia will find their way into European ports – including those in the UK. How much of it though will – or can – find its way onto rail?

A VISIT TO BRETT AGGREGATES TERMINAL IN IPSWICH

BY PHIL SMART

RAIL EAST has published several articles in recent years covering the campaign to bring forward the enhancement scheme at Ely. Much has been made of the importance of this junction for freight, mainly intermodal traffic from Felixstowe. Yet it is important to remember that our region plays host to a number of aggregate terminals. Although the geology of the UK has dealt East Anglia a good supply of sand to support the construction industry, limestone, granite and coarser grades of aggregate must be moved from quarries further afield such as the Mendips, the Peak Forest, Cumbria and Leicestershire.

Brett Aggregates is the UK's largest independent producer of sand and gravel, and recently invited me to see their impressive rail terminal in Ipswich in connection with my role with the Rail Freight Group. The site has been operating since the 1980s and Brett reconnected it to the rail network in collaboration with ABP (Associated British Ports) and Network Rail in 2012.

Based at Griffin Wharf, where access from the Great Eastern Mainline is achieved via a branch leading to the West Bank of Ipswich Port, this was once part of an extensive system of lines serving businesses including Ransomes and Rapier, who supplied railway equipment the world over.

The line was out of use for many years and was once threatened with removal when the port was sold to ABP in 1997 as part of the then privatisation of the British Transport Docks Board. The local authority, as part of the consultation at the time, insisted on its retention however and the line was reprieved.

Access to the quayside site involves a reversal off this north facing branch and, as the terminal can accommodate six wagons at a time, an 18-wagon train must be split into three via the reception sidings. The head shunt lies within the public realm and is fenced off to prevent unauthorised access.

Dredged sand and gravel for concrete manufacture is brought in by sea where it is unloaded, washed and graded, together with rock imported from Norway and the near continent. The site has long been an essential source of coarse aggregate for East Anglia, where there is little indigenous coarse aggregate in local quarries. Loose aggregate is distributed from the site by road and rail, with up to two trains per week when the site is busy. A concrete plant on site supplies local construction projects with concrete using imported aggregates.

This could soon increase, as the operation is ideally situated close to where the Sizewell C nuclear power station is being built. Planning consent for Sizewell requires the majority of materials to arrive by rail and sea, so as to limit the impact of lorries on local roads. There is provision for up to four trains per day from the Brett site to sidings at Parkeston Quay, near Harwich, where trains from Griffin Wharf could be stabled.



Phil Smart thanks **Olly Brown** of **Brett's** for showing him round the terminal and for checking over this article.

IPSWICH CUBS & SCOUTS GET AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF LIVERPOOL STREET STATION

BY THALIA WOODGATE

In my role as the CRP officer for the East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership, I look after community engagement on the routes between Ipswich, Lowestoft and Felixstowe. Earlier this year I was working with some Ipswich cubs and scouts, and as part of their "Platforms For Change" badge I took a group to Liverpool St station to look behind the scenes and meet the fantastic staff. Here's a bit about our day.

We were met by Raj, his second time doing our tour! Jaime Willacy and Josh Quirk and Galvin also joined in this year. First was the tour of the station starting with the Kindertransport monument. Then off to the empty, locked up platforms! Round the corner came Galvin in the customer support buggy, and off they all went. Up and down platforms 14 & 15, giggling and beeping the horn. From there we went to security. A great explanation of the camera system, which is currently being upgraded, zooming in and looking for suspicious people. Dexter was given control of the station fire mic. His announcement 'Tuesday cubs are awesome!' was heard by the whole station, then the other cubs all got the chance to say 'this is a fire mic test 1,2,3', to which all operatives acknowledged receipt by calling back.

Then we met Josh, what a man! He started when he was a volunteer at his local railway heritage museum in his teens, and went into rail as an occupation. He is definitely living his best life. He said he's excited every day to go to work, and loves it. He taught the cubs about how to dispatch a train, they got to handle the paddle, and they helped dispatch a Stansted express. Raj was his buddy, and they both explained the different light codes, and timings. Raj took his group into the cab as they were at the far end of a 10-car train, while Josh explained about the whistle blow, key system and the lights on the side of the train. Raj and Jamie were fantastic at explaining the safety involved, and how the station runs, they were funny and interesting — and the children loved it.

Indeed, the cubs loved the whole experience. The insight they gained about not only the general running of the station, but the rules and why they are in place, was clear. At the end of the day when I said goodbye, they were looking at trains in a much more in depth, knowledgeable way, right down to the individual lights on each carriage. Thanks to Greater Anglia for facilitating this visit and to the staff who made the experience so special for the children. (Photos from a 'thank you' by the cubs.)



NEWS IN BRIEF

WATLINGTON STATION 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS REOPENING

Two photos from Martin Thorne who attended the Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) special event on 5 May 2025.



COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS MEET THE PUBLIC

The Wherry and Bittern line Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) had a stall at Liverpool Street in May 2025, and Jayne Sumner, the Rail Engagement Manager at the Essex & South Suffolk CRP poses with a Railway 200 commemorative booklet. Both photos supplied by Greater Anglia.



CONTRIBUTIONS FOR RAIL EAST

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

All submissions by **22 August 2025**, 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.

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

JOIN RAILFUTURE — £10 PAPERLESS OPTION LAUNCHED

Railfuture is funded entirely by the public, who use the railway. Normal annual membership fee is **£20** (£22 for joint membership); under 26 years can join for just £14. Join online at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/> using a credit/debit card or PayPal. However, Railfuture has just launched 'paperless' membership for £10 a year for new members who pay by direct debit — also on 'join' page. We will make this available to existing members by the end of 2025.

railfuture East Anglia

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

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 21 JUNE 2025

St Mary's at Stoke
Stoke Street
IPSWICH
IP2 8BX

SATURDAY 27 SEPT 2025

Friends Meeting House,
5 Upper Goat Lane
NORWICH
NR2 1EW

SATURDAY 6 DEC 2025

Signal Box Comm. Centre
Glenalmond Avenue
CAMBRIDGE
CB2 8DB

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.

Follow Railfuture East Anglia on Twitter <https://twitter.com/RailfutureEA>

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