raileast

Newsletter of East Anglia Branch of Railfuture

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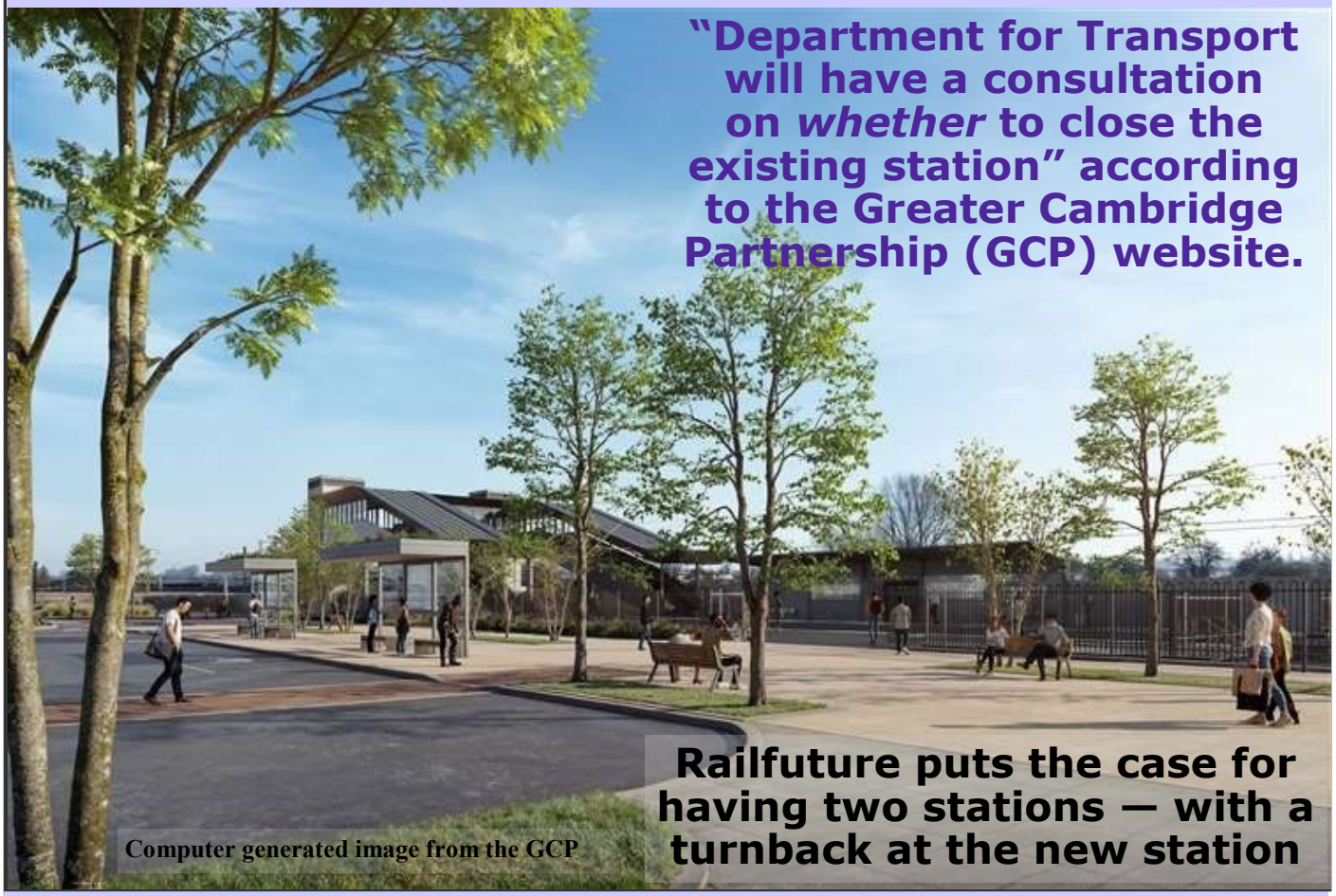
Waterbeach New Town station planned to open in 2027 as contract awarded



"Department for Transport will have a consultation on *whether* to close the existing station" according to the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) website.

Computer generated image from the GCP

Railfuture puts the case for having two stations — with a turnback at the new station

With 5.8% rail fare increases threatened in 2026 (if government continues its policy) we take a look at recent changes to rail fares

Inside this edition of RAIL EAST...

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS ISSUE OF RAIL EAST

Waterbeach and Ely stations celebrated their 180th anniversary on the same day. FLUA's Mark Collins at Waterbeach station, and a cake to celebrate the RUG's 40th.

FROM THE CHAIR
BY IAN COUZENS, CHAIR, EAST ANGLIA BRANCH

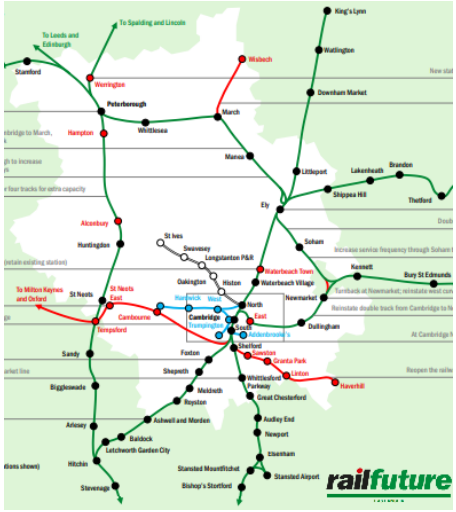
We know that it takes a long time to get things done in the rail industry, but how long do we have to go on banging the drum for the works to be approved at Ely? We might have thought that after all the lobbying carried out by the region's MPs, local authorities, business leaders, media and rail campaigners including ourselves at Railfuture, we might have got the project over the line this time. Of course, we do acknowledge the commitment from the government to proceed with East West Rail which, given the financial constraints, is hugely welcome. Still, in case some might think that East Anglia would otherwise get more than its fair share, it's worth restating that for freight transit Ely is a project of national importance – not just regional. If we want to remove the straitjacket from rail freight growth, here is the place to do it.

The strategic outline business case for Ely emphatically states "it is not an option to do nothing with regards to a solution at the Ely core and the Wider Ely Area". This was a document which the Department for Transport partnered and so presumably signed up to. All the Department can now say is that Ely would be "considered" for the pipeline for future funding. The government itself hasn't said much at all – this isn't a sustainable position for very long!

Railfuture meeting with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Mayor

Mayor Paul Bristow (left) with Railfuture map of the CPCA railway lines, with Paul Hollinghurst, Ian Couzens, Peter Wakefield and Will Nichols.

On 14 August, a delegation from Railfuture East Anglia met with the new mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Paul Bristow. The meeting was at the invitation of the mayor so we are particularly grateful to have had the opportunity to put forward our priorities for rail as we see them and to hear what he had to say. The mayor's manifesto contains a number of rail friendly policies where there is good overlap with our own. He restated his commitment to rail and intends to take on powers, shortly to be introduced, which will allow mayors to help shape the provision of rail services in their area. This is of course something we support.



The mayor is particularly interested in improving connectivity between Peterborough and Cambridge, so naturally the lack of news about Ely figured in our discussions. He would like to consider the potential for an additional route between the two cities via a chord linking the East Coast Main Line with East West Rail at Tempsford or St Neots, which is something Railfuture proposed years ago. We will have a look at that to see what could be possible on the planned route. We also suggested that in looking at a new station for Peterborough North (referred to in his manifesto), a turnback station at Werrington on the Spalding line could be the most cost-effective solution to be examined.

We provided the mayor with a list of our aspirations for short and medium-term rail developments for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and a rail map (above)

covering the area. These can be viewed on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display4091 and www.railfuture.org.uk/display4092 .

We are pleased to see the mayor remains opposed to new busways and favours light rail instead. However, we will have to wait to see how these conflicting strategies play out in the complex politics of Cambridgeshire!

Railfuture meets the public at Lowestoft station

The Railway 200 'Inspiration' train visited Norwich and Lowestoft stations each for four days in August. Railfuture East Anglia had a stall along with rail user groups and the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership (CRP) at Lowestoft station. It was a great opportunity to meet the public and discuss some of our campaigns with them. The exhibition train itself had some 3,110 visitors, the most to date of any of the venues. Our thanks are due to the Wherry Lines CRP and Lowestoft Central Project for organising the stalls and supporting events. We were there for all four days and are grateful to our volunteers manning the stall (pictured right, with Peter Wakefield and myself) over that time. As well as one of our banners, we brought along a wealth of Railfuture literature including RAIL EAST and Railwatch and it was quickly snapped up by visitors.

We would like to stage more publicity events, both to get our message across and to persuade people to become Railfuture members. This would be at weekends or weekdays. Please let us know if you would be willing to be contacted to ask whether you may be available for helping out occasionally? Extra hands are always very welcome! And likewise, have you any other skills that may help our campaigning – drafting and setting out leaflets for example? Do let us know. Please contact Peter Wakefield – peter.wakefield@railfuture.org.uk

Guest speakers for our events

It is important to have interesting guest speakers at our branch meetings to serve our members and get a sizeable audience. We try hard, and it can be frustrating when we fail to do so. Unfortunately, we have reluctantly decided to **cancel** our planned September meeting in Norwich because we could not secure a speaker. By way of compensation, we have asked Greater Anglia whether it might be possible to have a guided tour of Norwich's Crown Point depot for Railfuture members.

We've struggled to get guest speakers for Saturday afternoons. It's understandable as people want to spend their precious weekends with their families. We'd appreciate the help of RAIL EAST readers, which is sent to people in the rail industry, politicians and stakeholders (as well as Railfuture members). Would you be willing to speak, or do you have a colleague who might be willing to do so? Please contact me at ian.couzens@railfuture.org.uk.

We didn't have a confirmed speaker until just after the last issue of RAIL EAST was published. The Ipswich audience was thoroughly entertained by David Pearce, who is the chair of the Bittern Line CRP. He didn't speak in that capacity, but as a railway photographer, and he gave a photographic presentation entitled 'Departures', which looked at aspects of the railway in East Anglia (such as infrastructure and operations) that have disappeared over the last five decades. View his slides on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display4119.

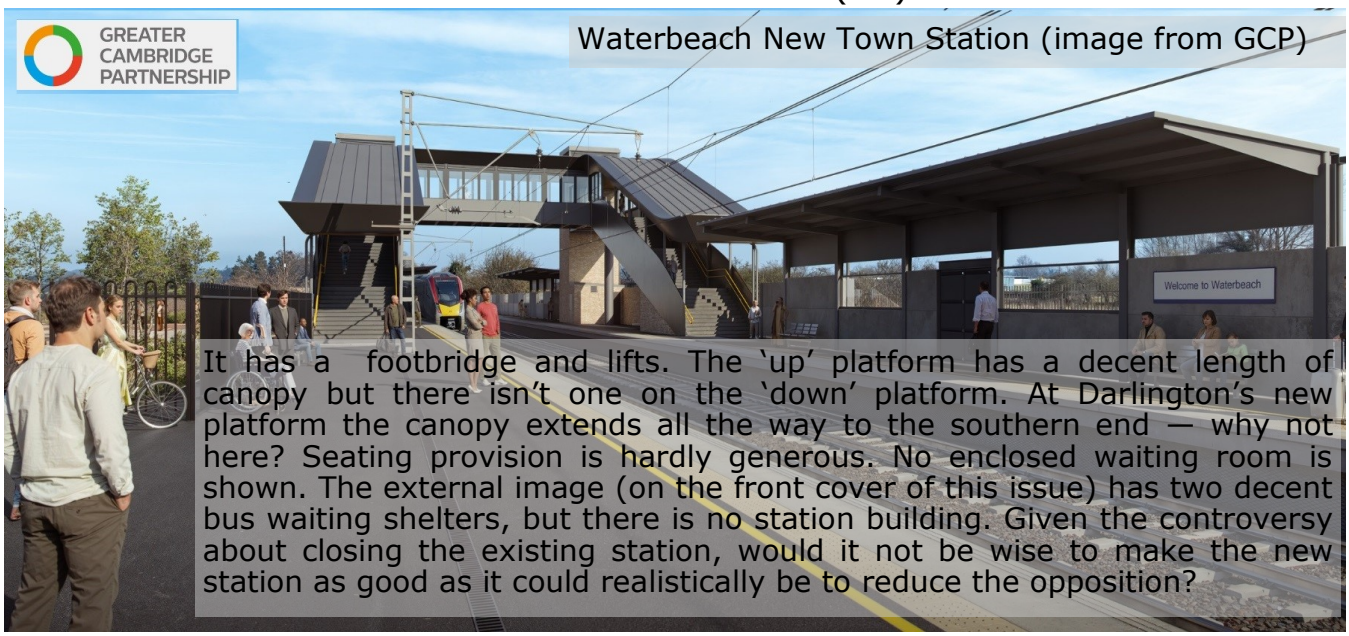
WATERBEACH STATIONS UPDATE — GOOD NEWS

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

COVER STORY

The proposed station to serve the new town just north of Waterbeach village, also to be called Waterbeach, has been given the go-ahead by the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership (GCP) and the main contract awarded to Spencer Group. It will serve a settlement, now under construction, of some 11,000 homes that will eventually accommodate 30,000 people. The new station will be fully accessible and have platforms that will enable "longer trains … to call … in the future", implying 12 carriages as the current standard train length is only eight.

Railfuture is delighted that this station is going ahead, possibly being completed by 2027, though it is important to note that it is being planned and funded by developers and local authorities including the Cambridge Growth Company. When the trains start to call will be down to Network Rail (NR).



Waterbeach New Town Station (image from GCP)

It has a footbridge and lifts. The 'up' platform has a decent length of canopy but there isn't one on the 'down' platform. At Darlington's new platform the canopy extends all the way to the southern end — why not here? Seating provision is hardly generous. No enclosed waiting room is shown. The external image (on the front cover of this issue) has two decent bus waiting shelters, but there is no station building. Given the controversy about closing the existing station, would it not be wise to make the new station as good as it could realistically be to reduce the opposition?

The new station will be about 1.5 miles north of the current Waterbeach station (about the same distance that Foxton station is from Shepreth station just southwest of Cambridge).

The Downside — Good for some, bad for others

The downside is that the current station is planned to be closed with a process that appears also to be down to NR. This will be costly as there will have to be a statutory closure public inquiry (led by an inspector) and if the closure is approved the current station will be expensively demolished. If, as is more than likely, the inspector refuses closure, we are not told what 'Plan B' is. Railfuture by contrast does have one, described in the 11-page Cambridge Crossrail document which we published in May 2025 and already widely shared with local councillors, NR and Greater Anglia. Read it on the website at www.railfuture.org.uk/display4072 (image, right).

"Nobody asked me…"

The local authorities appear not to have consulted any of the people who currently access the railway at the village station and make hundreds of thousands of journeys a year, instead relying solely upon consultants and NR for advice. Railfuture has sympathy for the councillors who vote these things through, as they must be overwhelmed by pages and pages of reports that they surely do not have

time to absorb and evaluate. Inevitably, they often just tick these decisions through based on recommendations of officers and their consultants. NR is never challenged on its negativity, because no officer or councillor is in a position to address the costs associated with a problem not of their making.

The current station serves a population of over 6,000 in Waterbeach village plus another several thousand in Landbeach and Horningsea villages. About one third of the Waterbeach residents may find the new station more convenient to use, but none of the latter. Most will find their access to the railway much harder. These include the hundreds of young people now and in the future, who use (or could use) the frequent train service to get to Sixth Form Colleges close to Cambridge and Cambridge South stations. Just a few minutes away by train literally, hours by bus now or planned. The same for hundreds who work around these and other stations.

Cambridge is undergoing huge growth that wasn't fully understood when the process of planning for the new town started nearly 10 years ago (Railfuture met the planners at their office in November 2017 – see the article in RAIL EAST 176). The planners must now start a rethink that makes easy access to the railway a priority; currently they are making it nigh on impossible for hundreds in Waterbeach village at the very same time access is being made easier for thousands as Cambridge South station opens.

Railfuture carried out a short informal survey of use at Waterbeach station on Monday 14 July 2025 between 07.00 - 08.45 on the 'up' platform (i.e. people travelling to Cambridge), looking at departures only. Note on Monday fewer people work in the office and by this date many 6th form students have completed their A-level exams so are not travelling.

Numbers boarding a sample of trains at Waterbeach towards Cambridge.
07.23 = 34 | 07.53 = 44 | 08.05= 43 | 08.26 = 43 | 08.34 = 15. Total: 179

Waterbeach station: Monday 14 July 2025 Waiting to board two of the five services to Cambridge that Railfuture monitored. Photo: Peter Wakefield

Most of these users were observed walking, some cycling, from the village. A few were dropped off and some certainly parked in the adjacent station car park. The train service is generally reliable, and it was noticeable how most users arrived "suddenly" just a few minutes before their train was due (something that will be more difficult when the level crossing is converted to have full barriers). Many arrived from 'up' and 'down' trains, and a surprising number were observed boarding trains towards Ely but were not counted.

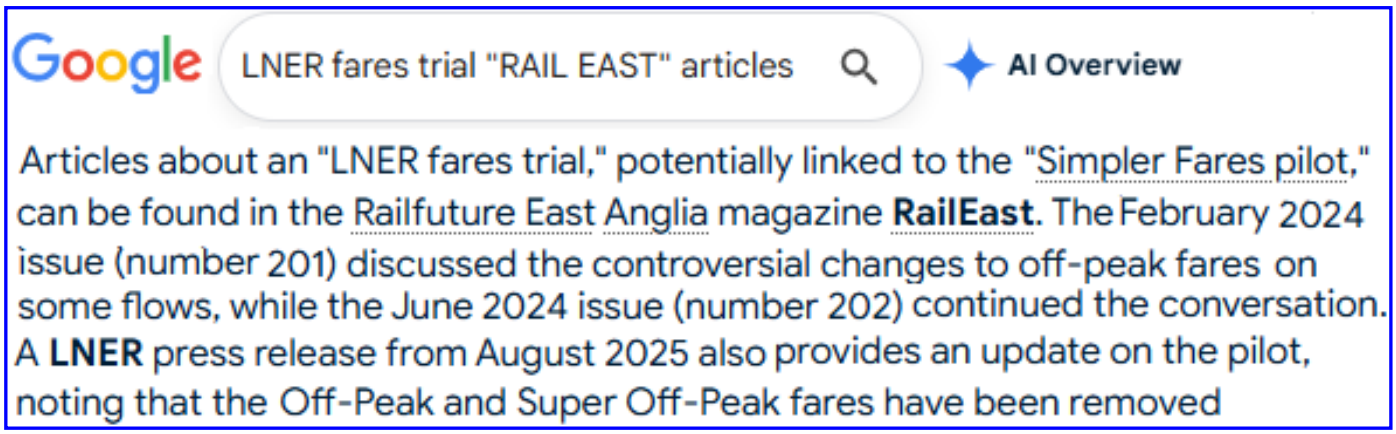
Help needed - please volunteer

Railfuture will endeavour to make a full all-day footfall count in September. This will need volunteers from early till late counting users on and off all trains, how they arrived and departed the station. We will probably have details of the Statutory Public Enquiry to distribute. The closure of this station, albeit coinciding with the opening of a new one further north, will cause huge damage and unnecessary hardship to the lives of thousands of people for many years to come.

Please send us an indication of your willingness to help as soon as possible. Contact peter.wakefield@railfuture.org.uk.

FARES (1) — LNER TRIAL ABOLISHES MORE OFF-PEAK FARES

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST



Isn't Google's 'AI Overview' functionality superb? A question about how RAIL EAST has covered LNER's controversial "fares trial" generated the above introduction.

LNER extended its misleadingly named *"Simpler Fares Pilot"* to an additional 27 Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Transport for London (TfL) stations in London from 7 September 2025. The timing is ironic: in the same month that ScotRail abolished expensive fares on all of its services throughout Scotland, LNER has done the exact opposite, abolishing the cheap ones, yet both operators claim to have "simplified" their fares. Fortunately, journeys in East Anglia that do not start or end on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) will still not be caught (yet) but Railfuture is vehemently against the abolition of guaranteed cheaper fares and fears their gradual erosion, which is why we're covering this for a third time in RAIL EAST.

Previously this pilot applied at around 20 stations on the ECML between London and Edinburgh. It abolished the Off-Peak fare, leaving the extremely expensive Anytime fare as the only guaranteed walk-on option. Passengers are instead pushed towards train-specific Advance fares, or a new "70-min Flex" ticket costing £20 more, which allows travel within ±70 minutes of a booked train. But there is no guarantee that any advance fare will be available, not just on the travel day itself but prior to it. It doesn't necessarily mean the train is full, merely that the quota has been used up.

Former bus MD, Roger French OBE, sets out the consequences of this in detail in this excellent post https://busandtrainuser.com/2025/08/15/lner-are-at-it-again/

Huge fare increases

To give one example, today you can buy a Knebworth–Newcastle Super Off-Peak single for £91.90, valid on any train except weekday peak departures. From 7 September this will be scrapped, leaving the Anytime Single at £176.90 as the only non-prebooked ticket — a staggering 92% increase. A return jumps to £353.80, unaffordable for most passengers who need flexibility. On some journeys people are being pushed into flying or going by coach, or just not travelling at all, despite some seats (subsidised by taxpayers) being empty. How can this be justified?

Complexity and confusion

Roger highlights how the system will create confusion rather than simplicity:

1. If a train is fully booked (i.e. quota consumed) at any point on your journey, then the Advance and "70min Flex" will not be available, and sometimes even the Anytime fare is omitted even though you can buy this and travel on any train. If there is space on any services within ±70 minutes of the train you hoped to catch, but no tickets were shown, then you can pay extra for a "70min Flex" on the other train and travel on the one you first thought of anyway. Simple?

2. If the Advance booking window hasn't opened for part of your journey (even the non-LNER part), only the Anytime fare will be shown as available.
3. If connecting services (for example Great Northern) lack Advance allocation, again only the Anytime fare is available.

Split ticketing workarounds

These issues will supercharge split-ticketing tools, since passengers will be able to save large sums by breaking journeys. For instance, a Knebworth–Edinburgh ticket may be shown at £176.90, but if the train is full only from Durham–Newcastle, buying split tickets Knebworth–Durham (Advance), Durham–Newcastle (Off-Peak) and Newcastle–Edinburgh (Advance) could make significant savings.

Why intervention is needed

The industry seems to be sleepwalking into an unworkable mess. On a limited trial of LNER-only flows it may have appeared manageable but once extended into the GTR/TfL network the pitfalls are obvious.

The press release talks of *"an important next step towards a vision for long-distance fares simplification"* — but if adopted nationally this will make rail travel unsuitable for many journeys. Thinking of a walking weekend but can't rely on the weather? Forget it. A family day out but not sure when you'll want to come home? Forget it.

It's time for Great British Railways — or whoever can intervene — to stop this experiment now. A genuinely simple structure should be underpinned by Off-Peak fares for affordable flexibility, with Advance fares for those with fixed plans, and "70min Flex" as an optional middle ground. Otherwise, passengers in East Anglia and across Britain face a future where rail travel is simply priced out of reach for many, decisions around when to buy a ticket are complex and passengers lose significant amounts of money when their plans unexpectedly change. This is no way to encourage people to travel by rail.

FARES (2) — GREATER ANGLIA'S NEW "LONG WEEKENDER"

BY PAUL HOLLINGHURST

The LNER fares trial is primarily about selling more operator-specific fares. Greater Anglia (GA) has always undercut Great Northern's fares, encouraging passengers to go to London Liverpool Street station to grab (some would say steal) revenue. Since 2020 all fare revenue has gone into the same pot (the Treasury). When simplification is the aim, should we really be introducing more operator-specific fares with more conditions?

Walk-on train fares have always had the same price regardless of which direction you travel in. Whilst simple, it does lead to full trains in one direction and near-empty trains in the other. That's not good financially. Greater Anglia has come up with an offer to help fill 'contra-flow' services. In July 2025, it launched a new ticket as part of its *UnLondon* campaign. The "Long Weekender" return fare is aimed at Londoners seeking a short break in East Anglia, with cheaper, more flexible travel.
https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/about-us/news-desk/news-articles/greater-anglia-launches-new-ticket-part-unlondon-campaign

How it works

The Long Weekender allows passengers to leave London Liverpool Street at any time on Friday or Saturday and return at any time on Sunday or Monday. Travel is valid on any Greater Anglia train, without advance booking or train-specific restrictions, and breaks of journey are permitted. If you travel out on Friday, you can even return on Saturday – though this flexibility is barely mentioned in the publicity.

Such flexibility is rare in Britain, but comparable to Belgium's long-standing weekend tickets (half-price from Friday 21:00 to Sunday night).

Savings and examples

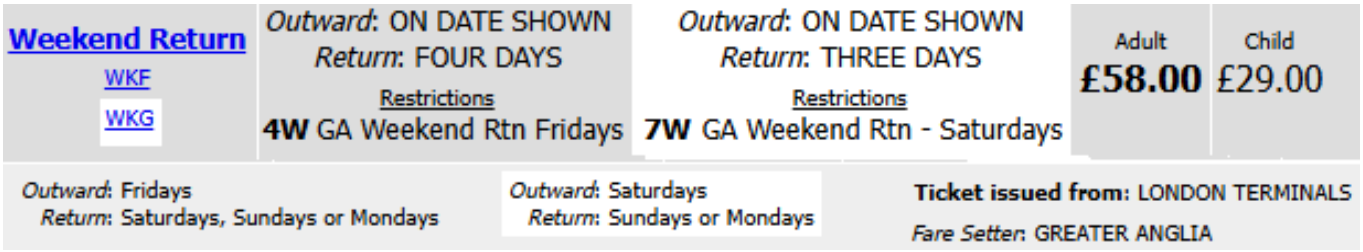
The ticket is available on selected routes from Liverpool Street, Stratford and Tottenham Hale to around 30 destinations in East Anglia. Example fares include:

Cambridge (GA): £31	Frinton-on-Sea: £43	Beccles: £52
Ely (GA): £32	Felixstowe/Woodbridge: £45	Bittern line stations: £59
Manningtree: £40	Bury St Edmunds: £47	Wherry line stations: £59

For Norwich, a £58 Weekender compares very favourably with the Off-Peak Single: £71.20, Anytime Single: £88.90 Off-Peak Return: £72.20 Anytime Return: £143.70.

For Norwich the Weekender can be **20% cheaper than Off-Peak** and up to **60% cheaper than Anytime fares** (but not as cheap as advance fares, where available, which can be £22 each way). On commuter routes such as Cambridge, however, the savings are smaller compared with super off-peak singles or Advance tickets.

Interestingly, according to the brfares.com website, there are two "Weekend Return" tickets, one departing on Friday (WKF) and one on Saturday (WKG), implying that travelling on Sunday and returning on Monday is not supported. Neither fare refers to "Unlondon" as that is merely a campaign, not a ticket type.



Availability and restrictions

Initially sold only at ticket offices, the Weekender became available through the Greater Anglia app and website from 18 July – but not from ticket machines, other retailers, or other train operators. This limited distribution feels unnecessarily restrictive, but follows GA practice of not supporting non-standard tickets, such as the Anglia plus, on its TVMs (this will be covered in RAIL EAST issue 208).

Website problems and confusion

See: https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/tickets-fares/daily-tickets/weekender-ticket

Clicking "Book your Weekender Ticket" simply keeps you on the same page – you need to fill in the journey details first and instead click "Find times and tickets". This results in a page of results initially focussing on singles. For example, a London–Norwich trip shows Advance singles (£44 total for a return) more prominently, while the Weekender appears lower down the results list. A banner saying, *"The Weekender is available for more flexible return travel – click here to select it"* would be clearer for a passenger who has clicked on "Book your weekender ticket".

This highlights a wider problem on rail industry websites. They rely heavily on journey planners, which work well for Advance fares but poorly for flexible, walk-up tickets. At ticket offices or machines, passengers can choose their fare directly; online, they must hunt for it.

Conclusion

In an era when the rail industry is pushing passengers onto train-specific fares as a way of filling empty seats, the Long Weekender is a bold step: cheaper than Anytime fares, valid on any train (including the morning peak), and more flexible than many traditional tickets. But Greater Anglia risks undermining its potential through arbitrary station limits, inconsistency in some of the publicity, a limited number of ways in which it can be purchased and confusing journey planner based online sales.

FEN LINE USERS VISIT CAMBRIDGE POWER SIGNAL BOX

BY JERRY ALDERSON (PHOTOS BY AUTHOR UNLESS STATED)


Photo by FLUA

The Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2025, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of reopening Watlington station (see RAIL EAST issue 206) and Waterbeach's 180th (see page 2). The rail user group really seems to have come alive with several public events, and on 9 August 2025 its members saw behind the scenes of the Power Signal Box (PSB) at Cambridge (on the left of the photo is Sallie Bates, a Network Rail sponsor).

The three-storey signal box opened in 1982 when the relay-based equipment (photo, far right) occupied a large amount of space on the ground floor. As the PSB took over control of more routes (e.g. Ely to Norwich in 2012) one might have expected even more space would be needed but technology has moved forward dramatically — and outpaced route expansion — with solid-state equipment occupying very little space (photo, near right).

It is fascinating listening to the sound of the relays which, despite their age, are extremely reliable. The new equipment is silent, of course. Perhaps the sounds should be recorded for posterity by the National Railway Museum, rather than be lost like other historical sounds, such as shunting a loose-coupled goods train.

FLUA's chair, John Grant, gives his personal thoughts on what he saw…

This visit to the Cambridge Power Signal Box was the first time I had been in a signalling centre for about 30 years, and I was surprised how little progress had been made in that time (particularly compared to other industries). It's maybe significant that apparently when training signallers on the new system it helps if they have experience of mechanical signal boxes with lever frames.

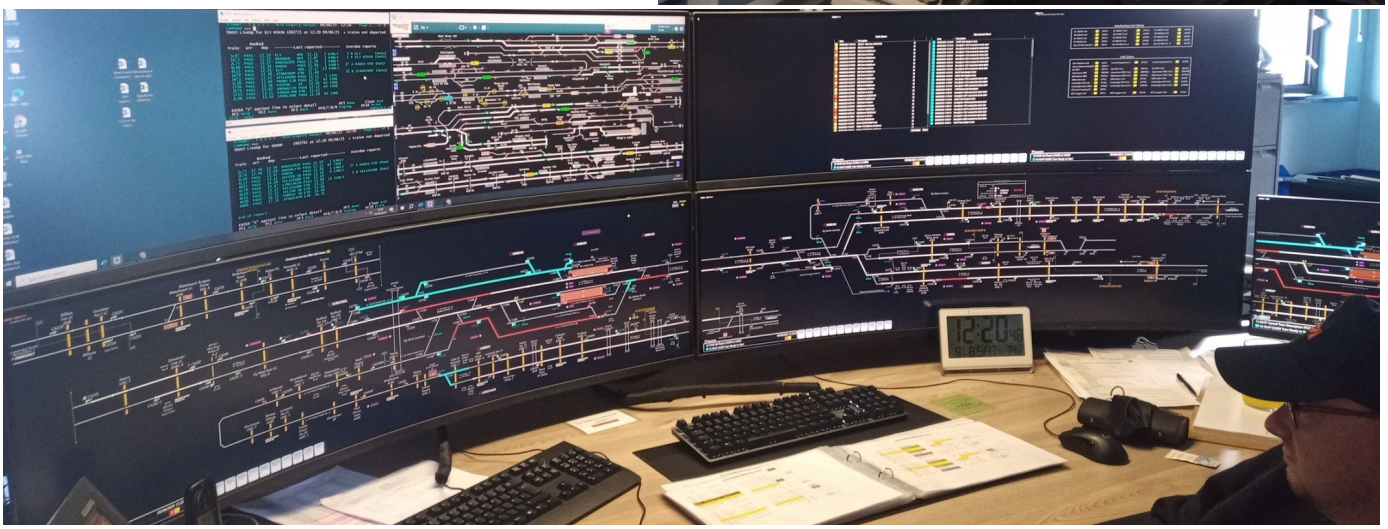
Towards the end of the 1980s British Rail commissioned the development of Integrated Electronic Control Centres (IECCs), and my part in the project was to supply the digital network that connected the different subsystems together. They included Solid State Interlocking (SSI), replacing mechanical relays, and Automatic Route Setting (ARS), which sets up the route for a train based on its Train Reporting Number and information in the Working Timetable. British Rail began rolling them out across the network, and were planning to re-signal the West Coast Main Line with IECCs that were interconnected so that the whole line could be controlled from any one of them. However, all that stopped with privatisation.

We were told that the new system being installed at Cambridge has SSI but not ARS, although ARS can be added later. Also that the delay in delivery which has prevented Cambridge South opening this year was caused by the software for the new system not being ready. Considering that the system does not seem to be very different from the one that was developed 30-odd years ago, and the industry has several decades' experience of estimating software development timescales, I find that very disappointing.

The signallers work on the top floor, where they have visibility of the station area, although normally they have no need to do so. When the PSB was opened, the

signallers controlled all train movements using the Entry-Exit (NX) panel (right), which can control both traditional relay interlockings and modern Solid State Interlockings (SSI).

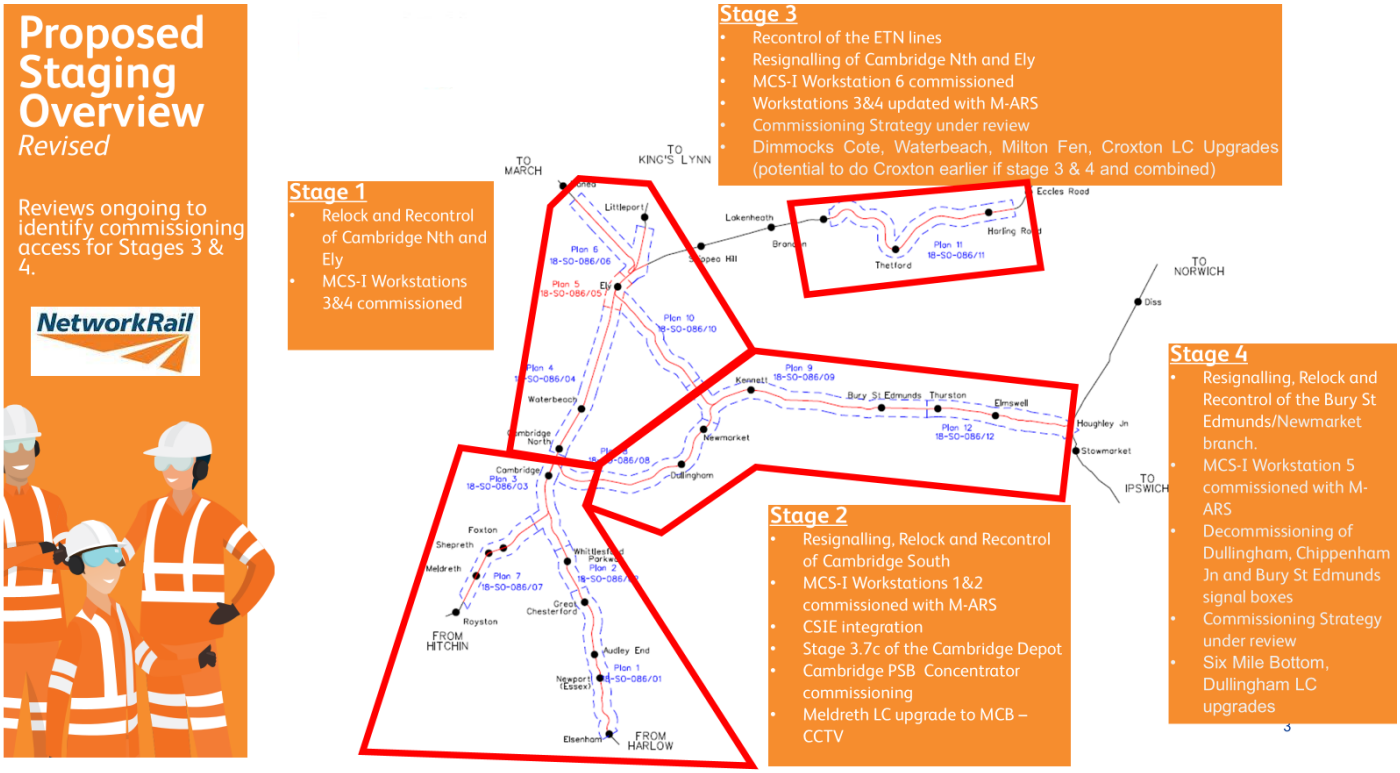
In recent years, as the PSB took over new routes, computer screens were used rather than physically changing the NX panel. In December 2024 screens (below) controlled Cambridge north to Ely.



On the floor below, there is a simulator for training signallers. It is, as you'd expect, just like the desks upstairs but without the level crossing CCTV screens.

FLUA is very grateful to Network Rail and its staff who gave so much of their time to the visitors and answered numerous questions. In turn, the staff enjoyed talking to knowledgeable visitors who were really interested in their roles.

Sallie Bates, who is Network Rail's Anglia Sponsor for Renewals for the Cambridge Re-Signalling Project, answered some post-visit questions from FLUA about the C3R resignalling project, which will be delivered in four phases as shown below.



NETWORK RAIL STRATEGIC ADVICE | PART 2
IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS FOR EAST SUFFOLK BRANCH

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

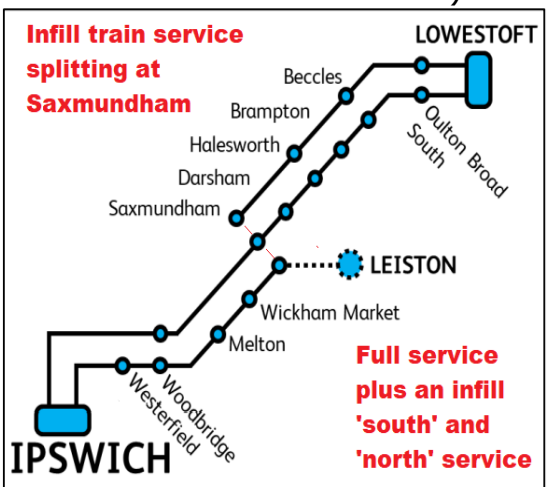
In RAIL EAST issue 206 (June 2025) we started to analyse what the Network Rail's Strategic Advice report says about the improvements needed for all the routes radiating out of Norwich — except the Great Eastern Mainline (GEML) — plus the East Suffolk Line. Here we look at the conclusions for the latter route in more detail. The East Suffolk Line in its current form is about 80km in length, linking Ipswich to Lowestoft, with branches at Westerfield to Felixstowe and at Saxmundham to Leiston. Formerly a secondary mainline, it was provided with double track throughout its entire length – but since the 1980s about 48km has been reduced to single track. This severely reduces capacity each hour to one train in each direction.

Woodbridge <> London Liverpool Street	50,598
Saxmundham <> London Liverpool Street	47,542
Lowestoft <> London Liverpool Street	42,144
Darsham <> London Liverpool Street	31,406
Melton <> London Liverpool Street	22,076

The Strategic Advice notes that no particular intermediate settlement dominates traffic levels and that all stations have generally equal footfall. What does separate the line from others in the report is the large number of journeys made from several of its stations to London – around 250,000 a year, all requiring a change of trains at Ipswich. The table on the right is from the top 10 journey pairs on the line in 2022/23 (page 65). Keeping the time penalty of connectional times at a minimum but at same time providing robust, reliable connection is critical for the way the line is used.

Having noted that capacity across the route has been seriously compromised by previous generations, how is it going to be rebuilt to enable the current strong and growing demand to continue? Ideally it should be restored to full double track. The report notes that this option would be "prohibitively expensive". So, to avoid the expense of making the entire route fit for purpose into the future, the study proposes a novel solution (extracts from the document are shown in blue boxes):

It is recognised that aspirations exist to double the service between Ipswich and Lowestoft, but due to the significant constraints on the line, it is already known that it is not possible to add in another service all the way without several upgrades on multiple sections of the line. Therefore, due to the known inability to path in a second train all the way along the line, and reflecting the polarised passenger flows, the greater economic value of Ipswich/London-orientated journeys, as well as the potential for a second service to be beneficial during the construction period of Sizewell C, it was agreed to split the line approximately half way and initially test whether the option of a second service as far as Saxmundham (referred to below as 'East Suffolk Line South') could be achieved. At the same time, a second service on the north end of the line to benefit passengers between Saxmundham and Lowestoft was agreed to be tested (called 'East Suffolk Line North').



Ipswich <> Lowestoft proposed service specification.

The result – 'East Suffolk Line South' service

Timetable analysis shows that at the south end of the line, another location would be needed to allow a second train to pass the existing one. Based on current line speeds and planning rules, the optimal place for this would be around Wickham Market. Passing trains at a station where both are planned to stop is more resilient than an isolated loop away from a station, so therefore it is recommended that if a second train was proposed at the south end of the East Suffolk Line, the second platform at Wickham Market station is reinstated, and both services call at the station – a slight deviation from the proposed service specification shown above, (in fig 12) with Wickham Market gaining a second station call.

To facilitate a second train, the single track Down/Up Lowestoft line between (Ipswich) East Suffolk Junction and Ipswich station would need to be doubled.

The result – 'East Suffolk Line North' service

At the north end of the line, to accommodate a second service between Saxmundham and Lowestoft, doubling the single track between Oulton Broad North Junction and Oulton Broad South station would be required, although the station itself could remain with a single line and platform. This section of line was previously double track, so the rail corridor is potentially wide enough for a second line.

Connecting Leiston

The restoration of passenger train services to this town of some 6,000 people is a key aspiration of Railfuture East Anglia. With so much economic activity in the area, in particular the work associated with the building of Sizewell C nuclear reactor, this is the time to realise that ambition. The new station would provide easy access to the railway for an additional 10,000 persons within a radius of 5km — note, not including the 5,000 residents of Saxmundham already served by their own station. The Report tells us that:

There are two ways Leiston could be reconnected to the national rail network — with an extension to the proposed second service on the south end of the East Suffolk Line, or with a standalone shuttle service. This connection would not only be beneficial in the long-term, but also in the short-term during the construction of Sizewell C, to enable travel for those involved in the power station's construction.

To connect the second 'East Suffolk Line South' service to Leiston, significant improvements would be required on the Sizewell branch and even then the turnround times at Leiston to keep the 2tph Saxmundham-Ipswich service at 30-minute interval, would be very tight, even unachievable, necessitating an additional unit in the train diagram. However, line speeds are very low and raising the limit up from 55mph to 75mph may well help resolve the dilemma.

Core Finding

The East Suffolk Line is the most constrained within the report's wider study area due to lengthy single line sections. Doubling the train service along the entire route is (currently) prohibitively expensive. The short-term goal is to double the service between Ipswich-Saxmundham, with the option of its extension to Leiston. How? Provide a passing loop at Wickham Market to enable the above half hourly service. Double the short single-track bottleneck from East Suffolk Junction to Ipswich station. The development of an additional train each hour as per "East Suffolk North" is not recommended to go ahead. If eventually a clockface 2tph end to end service throughout the day is achievable, Leiston could only be served by an inefficient Saxmundham-Leiston connecting shuttle.

The report tells us what's needed – have we the will? There will be 4 freight train paths a day for materials needed for the Sizewell C power station construction. These can be woven around the passenger trains – but such is the odd railway we've created when we are told that some of the constraints to 2tph are caused by the legal rights to a path for a rarely used nuclear waste train going to Sellafield. In the longer term some of these constraints might well disappear if the current timetable was scrapped and replaced with a new one based around faster running speeds for the required service patterns. It is odd that a rarely used train path takes precedence over the needs of the local economy.

Finally, there is the universal rule that NR can only re-lay a section of line "like for like". No other outcomes seem allowed — such as an increase of line speed to take advantage of the new track. We could improve the line bit by bit if some of the upgrades everybody wants could be an outcome of necessary maintenance. A faster line speed of an eventual 75mph could have an outcome of fewer trains needed to operate the line and still have two trains an hour.

And finally – New Housing

One aspect of this process not yet mentioned is new housing and its implications for train planning. For example, considerable new housing is being constructed alongside the railway in the northeastern suburbs of Ipswich, close to Westerfield station at the southern end of the East Suffolk route. See Anthony Cornell's article on page 14.

EAST SUFFOLK AND BEYOND – WILL THE FULL BENEFITS OF ELY AND HAUGHLEY BE REALISED WITHOUT FIRST UPGRADING WESTERFIELD JUNCTION? | PART 1

BY ANTHONY CORNELL

We now know that that the much-desired rail enhancements to grow capacity at Haughley Junction and Ely North Junction won't get government funding in the current parliament. But had funding to progress that project gone ahead, there is an existing weak point in the railway serving Felixstowe that already causes logistical difficulties — and which must be addressed if any future improvements elsewhere are to create the benefits sought. I am referring to the ability of the single-lead junction at Westerfield to cope with extra freight to and from Felixstowe. Arrangements at Westerfield are also extremely poor both for rail users and for road traffic in an increasingly busy part of the north Ipswich district. In this article I try to outline the need for enhancements at Westerfield as a vital cog in the bigger infrastructure machine. In this first part, I outline the various issues at Westerfield. Part 2, in RAIL EAST issue 208, will address some potential solutions.

Westerfield Junction is located around two miles north of Ipswich on the partly double track East Suffolk Line to Lowestoft, where the Felixstowe single line diverges south, terminating at the passenger station and two rail freight terminals. A few metres west of the junction is Westerfield station and at the opposite end of the station lies the Manually Controlled (full) Barriers, CCTV monitored (MCB-CCTV) level crossing operated from a desk at Colchester signal box. The original double-line junction to Felixstowe was remodelled during the 1990s by removing the facing connection from the 'Down' East Suffolk Line, leaving the trailing lead in the 'Up' line. To enable 'Down' trains to continue to access the branch, a facing crossover was provided on the Ipswich side of the level crossing, thus extending the single line to that point. As a result, all rail movements to Felixstowe leave the 'Down' Lowestoft line at the facing connection some 150 metres to the west of Westerfield station, and then travel on the 'Up' line, over the level crossing and through the station before taking the remaining connection to the branch. The single line then continues for around 2.5 miles (4km) almost to Derby Road station where trains can pass. A platform for 'Down' passenger trains to Lowestoft is provided at Westerfield, but there is no pedestrian footbridge or underpass provided for access between platforms or at the level crossing.

Westerfield station. The photograph shows a view of the station platforms and its junction (just before the radio mast) looking east towards Woodbridge, with the Felixstowe line diverging to the right.

The B1077 Westerfield Road is the main route to and from Ipswich over the level crossing from Westerfield and outlying villages. It is the only viable route to and from Ipswich through the village for larger vehicles, including ambulances and fire appliances on 'blue-light' duties. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has stated that Network Rail (NR) has an arrangement in place with the emergency services for the latter to contact the railway control centre and the barriers will be lifted when possible. When the office of the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner was asked about this, it said it has no knowledge of such an arrangement, and neither did the crew of an Ipswich based emergency ambulance that was canvassed. If such a life-saving arrangement does exist and is to remain effective, it would seem prudent for it to be reconfirmed at regular set intervals, to ensure it remains so.

Train Services

In a 2021 risk assessment for the level crossing, NR counted 161 rail movements through Westerfield – 69 passenger trains and 92 freight trains over a 24-hour weekday period, of which approximately 75% pass through the 'Up' platform at Westerfield. The Monday-to-Friday (M-F) passenger timetable comprises hourly, broadly clock face, off-peak services between both Lowestoft and Felixstowe and Ipswich, of which the morning 'Up' peak trains are supplemented marginally. Only six of the 17 M-F Lowestoft to Ipswich services call at Westerfield, these being the first four trains of the day, one in the evening peak, and the last. In the opposite direction, four of the 16 trains call, commencing with the first two services followed by one each at the beginning and end of the evening peak. On Saturdays, just one of the total of 32 hourly services on the line calls at Westerfield, this being the 22.27 departure to Ipswich. On Sundays, 16 of the 26 services do call, providing a marginally better than two hourly interval service on the Lowestoft line.

All Felixstowe line passenger services call at Westerfield and provide clockface departures with some adjustments around the weekday peaks. This provides the branch with a total of 36 M-F services, 34 on Saturdays and 22 on Sundays.

Station Usage

Usage is estimated to be up in 2024 by over 40% when compared to pre-pandemic levels, and grew 18% over the year to November 2024 (ORR footfall data). It remains under 20,000 passengers a year however, largely a reflection of the constraints identified in this article. The station is mainly used by people from Westerfield village and north Ipswich, who are required to undertake the 10 minutes' walk from both locations along the largely unlit Westerfield Road to reach the station. There is no area available at the station for drop-off or car parking, and so rail users are obliged to walk or cycle to the station, where two cycle spaces are provided. Even rail replacement buses do not call at the station, as there is nowhere for them to reverse to continue to their next station stop. On the south side of the station, the road and single pathway to north Ipswich suffer badly from flooding, even following light rain, with pedestrians having to avoid puddles by walking in the middle of the road. Although the bus service between Ipswich, Westerfield and outlying villages has bus stops at the station, the service is largely unattractive to rail users due to its low frequency and lack of service on Sundays and bank holidays. Visitors to the adjacent Railway Inn public house also contribute to the increased use of the station, as do those to and from the new country park.

New 'access-for-all' footbridge (in the distance) pictured under construction on Boxing Day 2022.

With 3,500 new homes currently being built within the catchment area of Westerfield station, and three new schools at the planning stage, there is ample scope to attract new custom to the railway. However, there appears to be no urgency on the part of the developers to construct footpaths to the station. A new long-slope footbridge (see photograph on the previous page) was erected across the railway some 200 metres from the station over the Christmas break in 2022, which replaced an at-grade footpath that has now been closed. The yet to be commissioned footbridge links the new country park with two of the three housing developments, but the bridge cannot be accessed directly from the station. The third housing development, which has many of its new houses occupied, is within walking distance of the footbridge by way of the country park. As positioned, the footbridge would be most suitable if Westerfield station was relocated nearer to it, as the station's present site has a very narrow and potentially dangerous entrance and exit ramp to and from platform 1 (see photograph below). Due to the private occupation of the former station house adjacent to platform 1, there is no scope for providing improved access.

Westerfield station platform 1. To avoid the puddle passengers will walk close to the platform edge.

Operations at the level crossing pose challenges both for rail and highway users. Barrier-down times are described in NR's own risk assessment as being 'excessive', with durations of over 15 minutes recorded. In times of perturbance, late running container trains to the port can back up from Westerfield to the point where they could obstruct the 'Up' Norwich main line. This is caused by the tight timetabling of the Felixstowe line, and the restrictiveness of the single line between Westerfield and Derby Road and at other places on the branch, where additional paths to cope with delayed container trains are simply not available. Where passenger services are delayed at these times, round trips on the branch then suffer cancellation to help clear the freight services. Highway users have recorded the barriers at Westerfield level crossing being held lowered for four consecutive trains on those occasions.

NR is aware of the additional risk posed to the safety of the level crossing by lengthy barrier-down times, as it can encourage waiting pedestrians to misuse the crossing by jumping over or squeezing through the lowered barriers or crossing at the platform ends, especially if they are likely to miss their trains and despite the presence of anti-trespass signs. Consecutive assessments conducted by NR in 2021 and 2023 have recognised the potential risk, with each proposing that a footbridge be provided as action to mitigate it. This has been identified in both risk assessments as being "accepted" by NR, but to date action to implement the findings has not been forthcoming.

So, a cluster of interlinked issues with significant impact on rail users, road traffic and the efficient operation of the railway. In part 2 (issue 208), I will suggest some much needed enhancements by way of mitigation.

This is Anthony's first article for RAIL EAST — we encourage new writers.

CELEBRATING THE VOLUNTEER 2025

BY CHRIS BURTON

Volunteering is the cornerstone of so many admirable outcomes across the United Kingdom that it should be celebrated more often. And it certainly was at Lowestoft on Friday 6 June 2025 where East Anglia's many active members of the Community Rail Partnership (CRP) were acknowledged for their work sprucing up stations large and small, and promoting the services using them. It yields many benefits, not least through an effective liaison with Greater Anglia, their professional railway partner, which helps to fund some projects.

But years ago, it was oh so different, when, exasperated by the inadequacies of their local railway, individuals got together to actively improve matters. And rail user groups (RUGs) were born. Their railway was usually far beyond media-spotlit commuter-land. No, they cared rather more about Honeybourne, Halesworth and Harling Road than dense numbers of home counties homesteads.

Across the late 1980s, although computers were very gradually beeping into offices and a few homes, most rail lobby group communication was still harnessed to pen, typewriter, Gestetner stencils and the like. Not least to publicise the sheer physical effort demanded in clearing and cleaning stations as well as replanting their pots and flowerbeds. All with railway encouragement. It worked too, grabbing public notice and, most importantly, that of local politicians and railway management. Railfuture itself had actively supported these local initiatives from when it was known as The Railway Development Society. We were very much in at the beginning.

Government cottoned on, realising some railway improvements were there almost for free, via organised volunteers. Thus the concept of the Community Rail Partnership — dating back to the mid-1990s — was officially recognised and supported by the government in 2004. In East Anglia the two oldest are the Bittern Line (1997) and Wherry Lines (2000), and there are many nationally. The embryonic work by user groups, however, had started much earlier, hence the big celebration on 6 June 2025 in the revamped Parcels Office at Lowestoft station. Entering very much into the spirit of the day came Greater Anglia, with funding and provision of one of their fine bi-mode trains to ferry the guests first to Yarmouth via Berney Arms and back to Norwich via Acle. Then after a short break, the train set off again, this time for the formal celebration at Lowestoft station. There lying in much appreciated wait was a light lunch and non-alcoholic refreshment, a very attractive celebratory Wherry Line display (photo below) plus concise speeches from Chris Mitchell, Chair of the Wherry lines CRP (right in the photo), Martin Halliday, who is the CRP Development Officer (left in the photo) and Greater Anglia's Head of Corporate Affairs, Jonathan Denby, all in celebratory mood. As well they might be as there is an immense amount of commitment and effort on the rail user group and CRP fronts. It works and very well! Buy an Anglia Plus day ranger (not from a TVM, though — to be covered in issue 208 in December), head east and see for yourself.

EXCURSION TRAINS – TIME FOR A COMEBACK?

BY DEREK MONNERY

From the earliest days of the railways, extra trains have been run for special events or to attractive places suitable for day trips. These trains continued after nationalisation of the railway network in the late 1940s but fell away after the Beeching cuts in the 1960s that led to a contraction of the railways, with many popular seaside resorts losing their stations and rail connections completely. In East Anglia, rail routes to Hunstanton, Mundesley, Brightlingsea, and Wells-next-the-Sea were all closed. Also, with substantial investment in road improvements, journey times by road were reduced, thus making coach hire more attractive. Nevertheless, British Rail still ran some excursions, advertised to the general public at stations, including a seaside special from Enfield to Clacton in 1976, using class 309 stock, and seaside specials to Clacton from inner London stations. Rail privatisation killed off the surviving special trains as fragmentation led to complex cost calculations if a train crossed franchise boundaries. Spare rolling stock was disposed of as accountants slimmed down fleet sizes to the minimum that could be justified.

Passenger numbers have increased substantially since privatisation, leading to some routes being filled to capacity. The only exceptions are some football specials and a few privately operated luxury excursions. These have a niche market offering fine dining experience in comfortable seating, and are so expensive that they are beyond most people's budgets. Even the standard class seats in these trains are much more expensive than standard rail fares. Haulage by main line registered steam engines or veteran diesel engines is part of the package.

An excursion train from the late lamented NENTA heading west for North Wales through Elmswell, May 2019. Photo Peter Rutt.

With foreign travel becoming more and more stressful, thanks to more restrictions on baggage and passports, and draconian security measures at airports, people are now considering whether a holiday in this country could be a better option. The major hotel chains have seized opportunities to provide additional cut price hotel rooms such as Premier Inns, Travel Lodges, and Holiday Inns. These are unfortunately often sited some distance from the nearest railway station. However, roads are becoming more and more congested as cheap petrol and diesel remains available. Meanwhile the relentless annual rise in rail fares continues unabated to a point where travelling by any train is a luxury. Today, a family of four could pay twice the cost of an equivalent car journey if they went by train, even allowing for car parking charges.

There is a huge untapped market for days out if reasonably priced excursion trains could be provided. With the coming state ownership of passenger rail companies, new opportunities will become available, as the artificial franchise boundaries disappear. One hopes Great British Railways will have freedom to be entrepreneurial.

Should GBR have an excursions division? It could conduct research to identify where people would want to go, where the train should start, and possible intermediate stations, and most importantly how much they should be charged. Once a train trip is organised, it should be heavily marketed, as happened in the past, so that the train is at least 75% full when it arrives at its destination. Destinations in East Anglia could include Bury St. Edmunds and Woodbridge, which are nice places to visit, and seaside resorts such as Clacton, Walton and Sheringham.

Because of gaps in the electrified rail network, most excursion trains are likely to be bi-modes, like Greater Anglia's class 755s. They could run beyond Peterborough to Spalding for the Flower Festival. Through specials could be run for sporting events outside East Anglia. Of course, gauging trains would need to be run to ensure that our trains fit other routes and vice versa, but the possibilities could be endless if suitable stock is available: many units sitting in sidings could be used for excursions. It is a case of thinking out of the box now the box itself is being removed.

EAST WEST RAIL, NEWMARKET & THE RAILWAY – PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Good news — the Treasury has confirmed its commitment to the East West Rail (EWR) project by allocating a further £2.5bn in the June 2025 Spending Review to enable its completion. The importance of this line to the nation, as well as the region through which it will thread its way, is demonstrated by new developments being announced which it will enable. For example, just west of Bedford, the mammoth investment by the US company Universal Studios in a theme park at Stewartby/Kempston Hardwick, is confirmed. In Cambridge another US giant, Meta (Facebook, Instagram), is creating a major research centre, adding to the presence of Microsoft and Apple. EWR will be a vital enabler for such big regional projects.

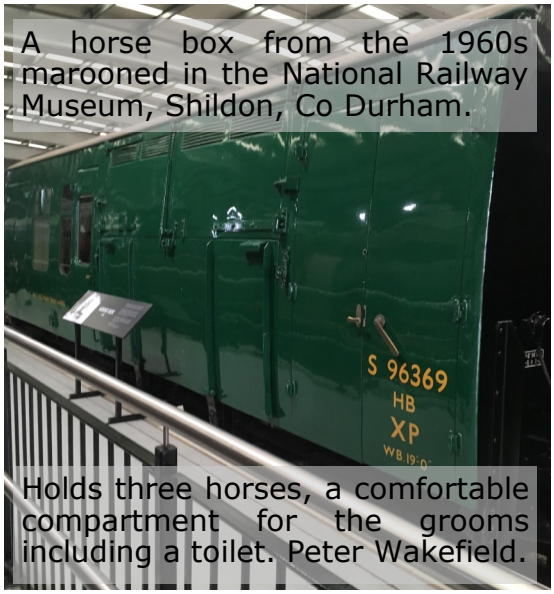
As RAIL EAST readers will know, in late 2024 the East West Rail Company conducted a non-statutory consultation asking for comments and suggestions for its proposed 'preferred route' for the new railway between Harston (southwest of Cambridge) and Bedford via Cambourne. The results will be announced by the company in its Statutory Consultation at the beginning of 2026.

The documentation accompanying the statutory consultation will no doubt explain how the current congestion at Cambridge station (a big problem facing the company) will be solved. Its proposed service of at least four trains each way every hour on the new line will stretch the station's capacity to impossible limits. Already, at many times of the day the platforms are seriously overcrowded. Footfall figures indicate that over 12 million people a year are now using them — probably the highest ever annual figure since the station opened 180 years ago on 30 July 1845.

A solution to current and future congestion at Cambridge station is to just "pause" as many trains as possible in a through platform and quickly send them on their way to 'turn-back' in a less congested but nonetheless, useful place to do so. Suggestions where this could happen are at Cambridge North station and even at the yet to open station at Waterbeach New Town.

An intriguing suggestion — and further good news — publicly put forward by the Managing Director of East West Rail Company, David Hughes, is that in addition to Cambridge North, trains could continue across Cambridge to a new station called Cambridge East and on to turn-back at Newmarket. Any turn-back at Newmarket would only work, of course, if the railway between there and Cambridge had its second track restored and it was electrified.

Railfuture fully supports all of the above! The turn-back at Newmarket would enable a much more frequent passenger service along the whole of the Ipswich to Cambridge route AND would make the restoration of the Newmarket West Curve viable, enabling through trains from Ely direct to Soham, Newmarket, Cambridge East and Cambridge.



A horse box from the 1960s marooned in the National Railway Museum, Shildon, Co Durham.

Holds three horses, a comfortable compartment for the grooms including a toilet. Peter Wakefield.

All this reminds us just how versatile and adaptable the railway has proved to be. It is 200 years since the world's first passenger railway opened between Stockton and Darlington in County Durham. The railway has continually evolved since then, successfully facing up to constant change. Locally, the railway allowed the hugely important equine industry in and around Newmarket to grow into a national, even world leader. Until the 1960s it allowed thorough-bred horses and their attendants to quickly travel all around the country in special horse-box trains (photo, above) and out and home again in a day.

Today most who once travelled to the races on trains now drive, and the horses move around in horse boxes on the road. But it could be that the East West Railway is about to allow the railway to play a huge part in the life of Newmarket once again!

Promoting active travel in Bury St Edmunds

Progress has made active travel to and from Bury St Edmunds station that bit easier for travellers walking, wheeling and cycling as part of a bigger journey. More human powered journeys to and from stations means fewer avoidable car journeys, less pollution from vehicle emissions, less pressure on constrained parking facilities — and travellers who are healthier and happier. What they call a win-win…

The existing cycle storage outside the main (south) entrance to the station is now supplemented by a handsome new facility on the north side, right next to the station access that was opened up to rail users in 2022. The new provision, announced at the start of 2025, includes a secure facility for 16 bikes accessed via a SMART card available for an annual £25 charge. The new cycle hub also has space for 52 cycles available on a first come first served basis. As well as protection from the elements, the hub has lighting and is monitored by CCTV. The overall high quality of the new Bury hub contrasts with the extreme variability of cycle storage arrangements at other stations on the Mid Anglia route – something to return to in a future issue.

Another very welcome – and seriously overdue – development in Bury is a new pedestrian and cyclist zebra crossing on Tayfen Road near the junction with St Andrew's Street North. The crossing has been funded by the developers of a large adjacent apartment construction now nearing completion. For years rail users have complained of the danger associated with crossing the constantly busy Tayfen Road en route to or from the town centre. The solution effected some years ago by Suffolk County Council was to construct a Pelican crossing approximately 200 metres the wrong side of the road for access to the town centre. Unsurprisingly, it probably ranks high in the national league table of under used road crossings. The new crossing certainly takes the risk out of Tayfen Road for pedestrians and is to be commended as a positive move in encouraging more (safe) pedestrian traffic to and from the station.

NEW HOUSING AND THE RAILWAY: BALDOCK & HITCHIN

BY PETER WAKEFIELD

Baldock (Hertfordshire) has a population of 10,616 (2021 census). This historic town lies mainly to the south of its railway station. It has four trains an hour for much of the day to Cambridge in the east and to London King's Cross and via St Pancras to East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton to the south. Between them, these services handled a footfall of 527,306 travellers in the year ending March 2024.

North Herts District Council councillors recently approved a masterplan for Baldock's housing development. It will see 3,000 homes being added to Baldock's existing 4,500 homes, mainly to the north of the station – thus putting it more or less at the centre of the town. When complete, the new development will bring the town's population up to about 21,000. It will be surprising if the annual footfall does not rise to well over a million when the Masterplan and any windfall sites are built out.

We are sure that the North Herts DC planners will ensure the station will be connected to all the developments by well-designed active travel routes.

(The Knights Templar School that serves all Baldock will probably be relocated into the new development. The school's name reflects the town's association with the international medieval hospitallers who named the settlement Baldock — thought to be a corruption of the old French name for Baghdad. Now you know!)

Next stop, Hitchin population 35,220 (2021 census). A few minutes after leaving Baldock station trains travelling south pass over Stotfield Road, where passengers will notice developers' flags flying and the first of 700 new homes emerging out of the former Highover farm. A huge development alongside the railway. When complete in a year or so, another 2,100 people for the railway potentially to carry?

WHAT'S THE HURRY? THE CASE FOR FASTER FREIGHT

BY PHIL SMART

In 2025/26 the rail industry across Britain is celebrating 200 years since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, widely accepted as being the first public railway, charging both passengers and freight customers for its use. At the opening ceremony on 27 September 1825, passengers were allowed to ride in coal wagons, a reminder that the line was primarily built to carry freight. Indeed, for some time after the opening ceremony passenger trains were pulled by horses, the early locomotives being reserved for hauling freight.

The reported speed of the first train was a mere 15 miles an hour, doubtless impressive for the emerging technology of the time, but it is worth reflecting on progress since then, and how the experience of passenger and freight customers has diverged considerably. Progressive speed records have been achieved with passenger trains as the various railway companies vied with one another to offer faster journeys on competing routes. Speeds of over 70 mph were becoming commonplace by the 1930s and today main lines offer up to 125 mph, a more than eight-fold increase since 1825!

Freight on the other hand has had a top speed of 75 mph since the 1960s, a mere five-fold improvement on 1825. This is partly due to the aerodynamics of freight trains and the potential risk of turbulence when passing through stations at speed. It is also perhaps the product of a lack of priority given to freight on the network. Why, after all, should it matter? A consignment of freight on a container train has probably spent six weeks or more sailing halfway round the planet before arriving in the UK. What does it matter if it takes a few hours more to travel from one of our deep-sea ports in the south to a terminal in Liverpool, Manchester or Scotland?

State of the art Stadler traction at its unveiling for GBRf in Peterborough.

The answer lies in how we make best use of our rail network. As long-distance passenger trains get faster, so they catch up with stopping passenger services and freight, presenting a headache for those charged with drawing up the timetable. Letting the fast train leave first is obvious, but the slower ones soon get caught up by the next fast train as increased service frequency responds to growing travel demand. So, what is the solution? One is to build an entirely new route for faster trains, such as HS2. With hindsight, it may have been a more popular project if it was sold on its capacity rather than speed benefits. If completed in full, it could have released enough space in the timetable for up to 15 extra freight trains on the West Coast Main Line. That is a lot of avoidable lorry miles taken off our congested road network! However, we now have the worst of all worlds, more services on HS2 vying with local and freight services north of Handsacre junction on the West Coast, and planners trying to work out how much needed extra capacity can be found. On a four-track line, it is easy. Put the fast services on one pair of lines and everything else on another. But north of Stafford on the West Coast and north of Doncaster on the East Coast, there are few places where this capacity is available.

Too often, the solution is to find a short section of loop line or siding where a freight train can be parked out of the way until there is another suitable gap in the timetable. Most timetables have a repeating pattern throughout the day, freight trains can be held for up to an hour at a time. Even then, we often find that a loop is not long enough to accommodate a 775m long freight train, as the loop was designed for slower trains in the steam age and turnouts have speed restrictions.

This all impacts on the cost of running the freight service. The longer it takes to complete the end-to-end journey, the more drivers it takes, as they will need to

change shifts along the route. If a train takes a whole day to travel from one end of the country to the other, it is unlikely that its wagons and locomotive will be ready to make the same journey again for 3-4 days once it is loaded and unloaded and returned to its point of origin. It is this decay in productivity that does little to make rail competitive with road and has exercised the minds of timetable planners to see what might be possible if freight trains were allowed to run a little faster.

A speed increase of up to 87 mph has been shown to provide enough benefit to reduce the number of stops the train has to make along the route, with a saving of up to four hours on the overall journey time. This would be enough to save a shift. If the train can return to its originating depot in two days instead of three, or three instead of four, more services can run using the same fleet. These higher speeds rely on having sufficient power supply for freight to use electric locomotives. These achieve better acceleration than diesel and can maintain higher speeds when tackling gradients, such as those on the West Coast Main Line. Modelling has shown that two class 90 locomotives could maintain the required power output, and that the new class 99s could be configured to achieve this without multiple working. Increasing demand for power on the network will present another challenge, but this should be measured against the greater challenge of charging the batteries for the 8,000 lorries that use the M6 north of Preston every day.

Anniversaries aside, we look forward to rail reform under Great British Railways. Essential to the government's missions for growth and decarbonisation will be an enhanced role for rail freight and our industry needs to look to the future with the same appetite for innovation that inspired the pioneers of the past.

This article (slightly trimmed for space here) first appeared in the 2025 Handbook published by the Rail Freight Group for whom the author works.

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION TO OPEN ON 26 JAN 2026

The train services to call at Cambridge South station (and also Beaulieu Park) can now be studied online via RealTime Trains (RTT). The service from Cambridge South appears to start on 26 January 2026, though the timetable starts in December 2025.

We reviewed the new timetable between Cambridge and London King's Cross / St Pancras in a previous issue (issue 205, p.17) and now we have more details via RTT of the vital Cambridge South / Central / North to Waterbeach and Ely service. This is one of the most heavily used sections of our railway. Currently it has 4tph all day long with additions in the peaks. The distribution of trains has been considerably improved throughout each hour in the new timetable. Trains will leave Cambridge Central for Ely at xx.00 (3 coaches); xx.15. (8 coaches); about xx.30 (3 or 4 coaches); xx.45 (8 coaches). Most trains between 16.00-19.00 are currently full.

A train service timed evenly through the hour every 15 minutes is certainly an improvement. However, the downside is in the evening peak two current "relief" trains, at 16.19 (8 coaches) and 17.22 (5 coaches), both very full, are to be withdrawn. This is very puzzling, as in addition to the rapidly increasing numbers on these services, Cambridge South's opening is expected to create a rapid build-up of new travellers. We expect the 16.00 and 17.00 to Peterborough and the services to Norwich at around 30 minutes past each hour to be overwhelmed as they currently operate as very short formations. A relief to both these services must be provided as it is quite likely many passengers heading west and east of Ely will find it very difficult to board the short trains provided by Cross Country (XC) and Greater Anglia (GA). GTR and XC are short of stock, so it is probably up to GA to resolve by finding a class 720 unit to shuttle between Cambridge South and Ely between 16.00-18.00.

Stephen Deaville, Senior Communications Manager at Network Rail, appreciated the "very positive" report on the site visit to Cambridge South station in May 2025 and has provided an update for RAIL EAST readers.

A changing places facility is now being provided and there will be various types of

cycle racks including extra-large bays that can accommodate cargo bikes. There will be station staff in both east and west buildings to assist passengers. However, they won't sell tickets themselves but can assist passengers using the TVMs if needed to purchase a ticket. So, it will not be necessary to walk along the busway to buy a ticket from station staff on the eastern side, as RAIL EAST had wondered.

The bad news, according to the Cambridge News, is that the toilets are all within the gated area and station staff will not allow people without a ticket to go through the ticket gates. Councillors are reportedly unhappy having been told the opposite.

The https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations/cambridge-south/ webpage suggests that there are no toilets or cycle parking at all, amongst other inaccuracies.

Meanwhile, at Cambridge North the vacant retail area is finally to be occupied, by a gym. Whether it will be financially viable in the long term (with a gym in the hotel next door) remains to be seen — it is understood that Costa Coffee pays £1,500 a month rent for its small kiosk. Let's hope that some empty station buildings at Bury St Edmunds, Brandon and even Trimley can finally find a new purpose.

Beaulieu Park station, north of Chelmsford, will open to the public on Sunday 26 October 2025 (with the opening ceremony the next day). It's a good time to get the station open though, as it's the beginning of half term. Although the station is just inside the Railfuture London & Southeast branch area, several people from that branch (including its chair, Richard Bowry and director Neil Middleton) and the East Anglian branch will be there on the opening day – we hope to see some of you there. There will be no stalls that day, but we hope to have a stall in November.

EAST WEST RAIL CHARTERS — BICESTER TO BLETCHLEY

The article about excursion trains on page 18 looked at special services advertised to the public at stations. However, there are many privately-run enthusiast charters. Several have run on the reopened Bicester-Bletchley route (as well as freight trains). Railfuture members travelled on 17 May 2025. Below are photos of the HS2 site and the Bletchley flyover.

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 are appreciated, and really are essential in order to make RAIL EAST visually attractive.

All submissions by **31 October 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.

Thanks to our appeal for vintage issues of RAIL EAST, a member provided four at the Ipswich meeting. These have been scanned and are on the Railfuture website. Only 65 of the first 125, from 1972-1998, are now missing. Do you have any?

railfuture East Anglia

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

MEETING DATES AND VENUES

SATURDAY 27 SEPT 2025
CANCELLED
NORWICH

SATURDAY 6 DEC 2025
Signal Box Comm. Centre
Glenalmond Avenue
CAMBRIDGE
CB2 8DB

SATURDAY 28 FEB 2026
Friends Meeting House
St John's Street
BURY ST EDMUNDS
IP33 1SJ

A flyer for our meetings is always at: www.railfuture.org.uk/east/meetings.
This includes a map of the venue and directions from the station.

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