

East Anglia

By Trevor Garrod
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Station to station walks

Railfuture, the East Suffolk Travellers' Association and the Ramblers Association invested money in the publication of a booklet in 2004 on Station to Station Walks along the East Suffolk Line. It was compiled by Roger Wolfe who checked out all the walks himself over a two-month period. The booklet contained detailed maps and illustrations and, apart from encouraging leisure off-peak use of the train service, was also very informative about the area's history and places of interest. The booklet proved very popular and was updated and reissued by the newly formed East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership two years later.

The third edition has now been produced, including some additional circular walks from stations on the Ipswich-Lowestoft and Ipswich-Felixstowe lines and some information about local bus services as well. It will be available at Railfuture East Anglia branch meetings or direct from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ. Please enclose £1.50 cheque payable to ESTA to cover postage and packaging. The walks can also be found at www.eastsuffolklinewalks.co.uk

Dirty protest to National Express East Anglia

The Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association's complaints to National Express East Anglia about trains so dirty you can't see out of the windows seem to fall on deaf ears, perhaps a symptom that the franchise has only a year to run. The group has submitted its comments on the new Greater Anglia Franchise, with requests for additional services, better connections and specials for Newmarket race days.

Walks in Mid Anglia

Twelve station-to-station walks have been published on MARPA's website www.marpa.org.uk and the member responsible for the research will be leading all 12 on various Saturdays in 2010. For details, see the website. Last year glossy 40-page booklets for self-guided walks from the Bittern line, from Norwich to Sheringham, were launched by Norfolk County Council. More info: www.bitternline.com/walks2.htm

Is this the start of the Beccles loop?

Network Rail carried out work to replace track and sleepers at several places on the East Suffolk Line, including Beccles station, in February. A stretch of redundant track was bedded in next to the currently disused platform at Beccles. Much work is still required, of course, before it could be used.

Suffolk County Council has earmarked £1 million towards the total cost of the project. ESTA has urged in a submission to the Department for Transport, that the franchisee expected to take over in April next year should introduce an hourly service between Lowestoft and Ipswich by December 2011 – and a loop at Beccles is one of the improvements needed to enable this to happen.

Small advertisements

Free to members (max 50 words)

Britain's Growing Railway: New 128-page book published by Railfuture. A5 perfect-bound format. Lists and gives details of all new and reopened stations over the past 50 years. £9.95 per copy, including free delivery. To order, send a cheque for £9.95 to Britain's Growing Railway, 24 Chedworth Place, Tattlingstone, Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2ND. Make cheques payable to Railfuture. Or buy online using PayPal at www.railfuture.org.uk/books/

For more information, email BGR1@railfuture.org.uk
Author offers books and tutoring: Author of 13 books including latest one on transport economics offers books to members at a discount. Also tutoring (via Skype) on economics and business, etc. For details, please see website www.davidjohnspurling.com

Airport rail links

By Trevor Garrod

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Nearly 100 copies of Railfuture's Airport Links report were sent in February to train and airport operators, politicians, regional or local authorities, tourist boards and other relevant bodies throughout Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Many interesting responses were received and are being analysed by our international committee.

Some airports replied in detail on what they are doing to encourage more passengers to use public transport.

For example, Bristol Airport has, in partnership with First Great Western, installed a Fast Ticket machine to enable passengers to purchase tickets for the Flyer express coach service to Temple Meads station and their onward journey by train to most stations in the country.

The airport's target is for 15% of all its passengers to use public transport in future. This includes, for example, foreign visitors to the 2012 Olympic sailing events in Weymouth, who will be encouraged to complete their journey by train. For more information, please go to www.bristolairport.com

London Oxford Airport, which is at Kidlington, just north of Oxford, plans to take advantage of the proposed new Marylebone-Oxford service, with a bus shuttle to the proposed Water Orton park-and-ride station.

Southend Airport managers have updated us on the progress of their new rail station, expected to open this summer. They also see an important role for their airport in bringing visitors to London, with a frequent train service to Stratford and Liverpool Street.

The surface access manager at Gatwick airport, Mr James Bradley, informed us that 30% of their arrivals are currently by train and they aim to increase this.

However, they face challenges because of the pressure on the Brighton line and withdrawal of the cross-country rail service to Birmingham.

Mr Bradley wrote: "National support for dedicated airport access is critical for increasing sustainable access to airports."

Many airports are being required to produce surface transport strategies.

The Railfuture international committee is keen to receive further reports from members on their own experiences when travelling to and from UK airports. Send your comments to *Railwatch* or to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

Pulling power

Should heritage railways provide a public transport service? The answer is not a simple one.

The business model for a heritage railway is different from that of a line that forms part of the national rail network.

Heritage lines are largely run by volunteers, with many older people undertaking the core roles. They do a fantastic job, and the 100-plus heritage railways in Britain today would not exist without them.

Volunteers go the extra mile to look after their passengers or improve their railway, but in general, they do not want to work shifts, nor do they want to work 365 days a year.

Passengers, however, expect trains from around 06.00 to around 23.00 or later, throughout the year. Some are even calling for services on Christmas Day!

This requires paid staff rather than volunteers, and of course, the economics change.

Heritage fares are usually higher per mile than the national rail network average.

This is because there is no franchise support payment, and the cost of train operation, and particularly steam, is high – think £500 a day on average just to steam a loco, with hire charges or the cost of 10-year overhauls on top of that.

Generally, regular travellers would be looking to pay something less for a season ticket, or to have the benefits of a local resident's railcard for their daily commute.

To provide a public service every day, through the day, the cost base increases dramatically, but the revenue earned falls.

The result is a funding gap which has to be filled with a support payment, just like a main line franchise operator.

Now, none of this means that heritage railways cannot serve a local transport need, and many do. Think of all those cars clogging the streets of Dartmouth, if the Paignton and Dartmouth Railway were not there.

The Welsh Highland Railway was built to provide car-free access for visitors to the Snowdonia National Park. The Swanage park-and-ride scheme keeps a lot of cars out of the village of Corfe Castle. But none of these aim to offer an 06.00 to 23.00 service, nor are they expected to operate every day of the year. Despite this,

HERITAGE RAIL

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BIG DAY: Oliver Cromwell arrives at Sheringham on 11 March



WELCOME PARTY: N2 class loco waits at Sheringham

heritage railways are vitally important to the communities they serve, and their beneficial impact on tourism has a real effect on the economy of the area. Some lines could have an important role to play in local transport, as well as tourism.

A couple were identified in the *Connecting Communities* booklet published by the Association of Train Operating Companies.

But any change will want careful thought, and above all, it is important not to damage the very successful businesses that heritage railways are, nor their ability to support themselves without recourse to the taxpayer.

Network News

North Norfolk Railway

The pictures say it all! The pulling power of rail was shown by the crowd of over 5,000 at the opening of Sheringham level crossing on 11 March, restoring the link between the Bittern Line and the North Norfolk Railway. The first train across was a charter from Liverpool Street to Holt, the first time that has been possible for 50 years!

Swanage Railway

Just £3 million is needed from local authorities to close the gap

between the national rail network and the Swanage Railway at Wareham. This is the cost of upgrading the junction, providing proper signalling and control systems at Worgret Junction and to allow trains to turn back at Wareham station, as well as the interface between the new signalling on the main line, and the more traditional equipment used on the SR.

Compared with the cost of Dorset's roads, including the £87 million Weymouth bypass for the Olympics, this is pretty small beer. However, we know that finding money for roads has always been easier than for rail schemes, so we need to watch this closely. It is a real test for the priorities of the local and regional authorities.

West to Corwen

In April, the Llangollen Railway ran a non-stop train from Llangollen to Carrog, the present limit of operations, and organised a sponsored walk over the formation of the line from there to Corwen, as part of a fund raising effort to raise money for the 2.5 mile extension.

Chris Austin OBE was head of public affairs at the Association of Train Operators until last year, after a railway career spanning 42 years.

Picture: Richard Dixon

Picture: Ian Dinmore

Wessex

By John Friedberger

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Southern plans

The branch AGM was held in Eastleigh on 6 March. Jane Lee, head of corporate affairs for Southern Railway, was our guest speaker. In her introduction Jane explained the latest situation with respect to the new Southern franchise. Passenger Focus had played a prominent role in determining the provisions of the franchise and passengers are at the forefront of the company's plans. No ticket office closures are planned and it is hoped to run some additional late evening trains.

Of particular interest to the Wessex branch are plans to lengthen busy trains through a rolling stock redistribution resulting in some suburban-type trains on short journeys in Sussex (for example, Brighton-Seaford), a Sunday service from Brighton to Southampton and an hourly service via Eastleigh and Southampton Airport to Southampton.

In answer to questions, Jane explained that the latter will run in a triangle: Fareham-Eastleigh (reverse)-Southampton Airport-Southampton-Fareham. The opposite direction would involve too much disruption resulting from crossing lines at Eastleigh. It was suggested from the floor that the service should stop at Hedge End, an increasingly busy station. The layout of some Southern rolling stock with a mix of 2+3 and 2+2 seating was commended.

South coast to the Midlands

Wessex Branch was represented at the Yeovil launch of Go! Cooperative, an open-access train operator which uses mutual ownership for its business model. The initial plan is to run four trains a day between Yeovil Junction and Banbury via Westbury, Melksham, Swindon and Oxford from December 2011, with weekend trains extended to Weymouth and an eventual northern connection to Birmingham Moor Street. The aim is to stable three trains of locomotive-hauled coaches at Yeovil Junction, two operational and one spare. Bus feeder links and shared-ownership car schemes are also on the company's agenda. Details are on the website: www.go-now.coop.

Portsmouth main line rolling stock survey

Railfuture members supported Portsmouth City Council's initiative in conducting a survey of passengers on morning commuter trains in early March. About 74% of the 919 people sampled expressed a clear preference for the 2+2 seating in the white class 444 Desiro trains over the 2+3 arrangement in the blue class 450s. Rolling stock on this main line to Portsmouth should therefore be restored to the summer 2006 level and in future passenger consultation should receive higher priority when franchises are to be re-let. This process was lacking in the case of the SWT franchise as the old RPC had been abolished and Passenger Focus was not then organised to consult fully.

Freight upgrade

The Christmas/New Year closure at Southampton to permit greater use by container traffic through the tunnel was a model of engineering planning. However work continues on other Hampshire tunnels resulting in extensive weekend closures, unwelcome bus substitution and disruption to road traffic. We hope the result will mean reduced road freight on the M3/A34 to the Midlands as hauliers switch to rail.