

East Anglia

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Partnership under threat

Community Rail Partnerships in Norfolk are under threat from budget cuts by the county council. The proposal is to cut the funding completely in the 2011/12 budget. The branch has written in protest to this cut, arguing that the CRPs represents excellent value for money as they have encouraged more people to use the train service and to visit the area resulting in extra local jobs and helping reduce traffic congestion. We have asked the county to consider reduced funding to allow an alternative organisation to be put in place to ensure the benefits of CRP will not be lost in the future.

North Walsham survey

Last year, the branch worked with National Express East Anglia and local councils to conduct a survey at North Walsham station. In addition to talking to rail users, forms went to homes in the area. A total of 1,400 were completed, many from non-rail users. The branch is attending the workshops to develop an action plan based on the responses.

West Anglia service improvements

The branch welcomed proposals by National Express East Anglia to improve services on the West Anglia route between Liverpool Street and Cambridge. New stock is being introduced to provide longer trains in the peaks. In addition there are proposals to speed up Cambridge to London trains as well as a new service between Ely and Stansted Airport.

No sign of the busway

It is unlikely that buses will be using the Cambridge guided busway before July, nearly two and a half years after the route was expected to open. At the same time, the expected cost has risen to £180 million, a 70% increase on the original price.

Lowestoft victory for rail campaigners

The East Suffolk Travellers' Association and Railfuture's East Anglian branch appear to have won their campaign to keep Lowestoft station on its central site. However, to drive our points firmly home, both organisations have sent in comments on Waveney District Council's *Lowestoft Lake Lothing & Outer Harbour Area Action Plan*. This document appears to rule out any movement of the station in the foreseeable future. ESTA has urged the council to "accept that in both the short term and the long term, relocation of Lowestoft station is neither strategically acceptable nor legally possible." We are reminding the council that the only known survey of rail passengers in recent times (conducted by ESTA with Railfuture support in August and September 2009) shows that rail business would be lost if the station were moved. Now, we would be delighted if the council were to fund additional shelters and an enhanced bus and train real time information system at the station.

Pianos rescue station from dereliction

In the 1970s Wymondham station in Norfolk was a grim place to wait with empty boarded-up buildings. It is different now, thanks to David Turner who 22 years ago, established his piano-tuning business and the Brief Encounter restaurant in the redundant station building. Gradually the rest of the buildings were restored and then the train operating company established a part-time booking office there. David, who has won awards for the station, is now retiring, but we understand that a new tenant will take over and that there will still be a restaurant. Let us hope that "Windum" station on the Norwich-Ely line will continue to flourish and provide an example of what can be done elsewhere.

No chance of a fair deal on rail tickets

In spite of all the encouragement the Government still persistently gives to drivers, increasing numbers are turning their backs on the anarchy of the roads and choosing the sanity of train travel.

The number of passenger journeys made by train last year reached 1.32 billion, a 6.9% rise compared with 2009, according to the Association of Train Operating Companies.

This should be a reason to celebrate but the Government seems determined to choke off that growth by allowing rail fares to rise, year after year, by more than the rate of inflation.

The existing high level of rail fares is always cited as the main reason why some people do not travel by train.

ATOC insists there are still rail fare bargains to be had. But it is not so forthcoming about some rises in the London area in January of 42% on some day return fares, and 13% rises on some sea-

son tickets. And no one can seriously dispute that Britain's rail fares are the highest in Europe.

Thirty years ago, Labour Greater London Council leader Ken Livingstone and Dave Wetzel launched their Fares Fair policy.

But the problem of high fares is nationwide. In 1993 the Tory Government doubled the cost of running the railway by privatising it and subsequently rail users have been forced to pay increasing fares.

Some annual season tickets now cost more than £5,000 but when challenged about increasing fares, Michael Roberts, chief executive of ATOC, said the rises were part of Government policy to make rail passengers pay a greater share of the cost than taxpayers.

There is no prospect of the Government changing its policy. It seems determined to continue increasing rail fares by 3% more than the rate of inflation for at least the next four years. Hardly

a pro-rail policy. Railfuture warned in a press release that it will choke off demand for rail and put people back in their cars. There is nothing similar for road or plane users. The sensible fuel duty escalator has been scrapped and there seems no prospect of an aviation fuel tax being introduced. It is time rail passengers were given a fair deal.

It is unreasonable to expect rail passengers to pay such big increases year after year even if, as ATOC argues, it will lead to "more trains and better services". It will certainly help train company profits.

The nationalised railway was cheaper to run even though free market propagandists argue that private enterprise is more cost effective. There is no sign of that from the private rail companies.

Eight years ago, Railfuture commissioned a report which showed that a national railcard giving discounted rail fares would pay for itself by generat-

ing new business. The private rail companies refused to consider it. So most rail passengers continue to pay top-whack fares because it is difficult for them to predict in advance when they need or want to travel. Advanced purchase tickets are taken up by only 20% of passengers.

By contrast there is still lots of money that could be squeezed out of car drivers.

Some car drivers are so determined to park illegally that they paid £914,000 in fines in just one London road - Clapham Park Road in Lambeth.

Also in London, the Blackwall Tunnel was closed 1,200 times in less than a year because "ignorant motorists" failed to heed height restrictions or ran out of fuel in the tunnel.

Simply enforcing road traffic laws would bring in an immense amount of revenue but instead the Government is considering helping motorists to pay lower prices for their fuel. Why?

Wessex

By John Friedberger
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Light rail initiative

A technical hitch has forced the postponement of a four-week trial of a Parry People Mover ultra-lightweight railcar planned for February on the Mid Hants Railway, which would have provided a rail link from the growing commuter community of Medstead and Four Marks to connect with South West Trains services at Alton to London Waterloo. The service, branded GOCO Mid Hants Link, had won support from Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council, Lightweight Community Transport, John Parry Associates and South West Trains. It is being funded entirely by the Go! Co-operative, trading as GOCO. Five morning and five evening journeys were planned, on Mondays to Fridays. GOCO's Chris Phillimore said: "Work will continue to address the technical issues and during this time, alternative options for a replacement vehicle will also be considered. We have been very heartened by overwhelming positive response to the concept of this service." Staffing is to be provided by the Mid Hants Railway and GOCO while tickets will be issued on the train by a conductor guard.

Rail safety crackdown while road anarchy continues

Anyone campaigning for a foot crossing to be kept open should note the extraordinary measures taken by Network Rail in the past few months at Wareham, Dorset. For several years, the busy crossing point near the station was protected by flashing red lights, klaxons, a recorded voice announcement and CCTV cameras, plus zig-zag barriers to prevent cyclists speeding across. With evidence of pedestrians crossing against the red lights, NR insisted that more should be done. The existing measures have been supplemented by 8ft high, anti-climb fencing and gates either side of the line, together with a security cabin manned from around 06.00 to midnight. When the security guard receives the all-clear from the signal box, he presses a button and the 8ft gates swing open, accompanied by flashing and beeping from beacons fitted to the gates themselves. Meanwhile, in the town centre, drivers ignore traffic lights and pedestrians walk over the road when they please.

Rail staff battle snow to keep trains running

The branch congratulates staff at SWT and CrossCountry for running the best service they could during the snow. After severe problems on the first day, SWT either ran a normal service or a special "snow timetable". This still provided a comprehensive pattern of trains during normal hours of operation with no early finishes.

Better services to Leeds, York and Newcastle

The branch welcomes five extra services now being run by Arriva CrossCountry to and from Southampton and the North East of England. This is a very welcome entrepreneurial decision as the extra services go some way to restoring direct links between two important English regions for which the branch has lobbied. Sadly, though, we still have no direct service to Scotland.

Station improvements show up Network Rail

SWT is taking long-awaited and much-needed steps to bring some of its smaller stations up to a reasonable standard of appearance and passenger comfort. Examples are new waiting shelters at Overton and a repaint of Whitchurch. The footbridge and canopies on the station house and waiting room at Whitchurch still look neglected but we understand they are to be renovated as part of the W10 regauging work for the Southampton-Midlands freight diversionary route.

Floods, snow and progress

Sadly, the Gloucestershire & Warwickshire Railway was hit with a second major landslide in January, severing the line just north of Winchcombe, just at the point where a British Rail freight train was derailed in 1976, leading to a previous closure of the line.

A £1 million appeal has been launched to repair the line here and at Gotherington where a slip took place last April.

The GWR will definitely be running in 2011, probably using the newly restored section of line north from Toddington to Stanway viaduct, but it may be some time before they can return to Cheltenham racecourse.

The Bodmin & Wenford Railway also suffered a slip in November, between Colesloggett Halt and Bodmin Parkway, but it did not affect their programme of Santa Specials.

Money, money, money! Railways are an expensive business, even in the heritage sector, and all heritage railways have to appeal for money from the public to fund new projects. The Welsh Highland is going for no less than £8.5 million under the banner of "Let's finish the job." The money raised will pay for major investment in rolling stock and workshop capacity, as well as

enhancement of the principal stations at Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The Bluebell Railway's £2.5 million appeal is still open and aims to pay for completion of its northward extension to East Grinstead.

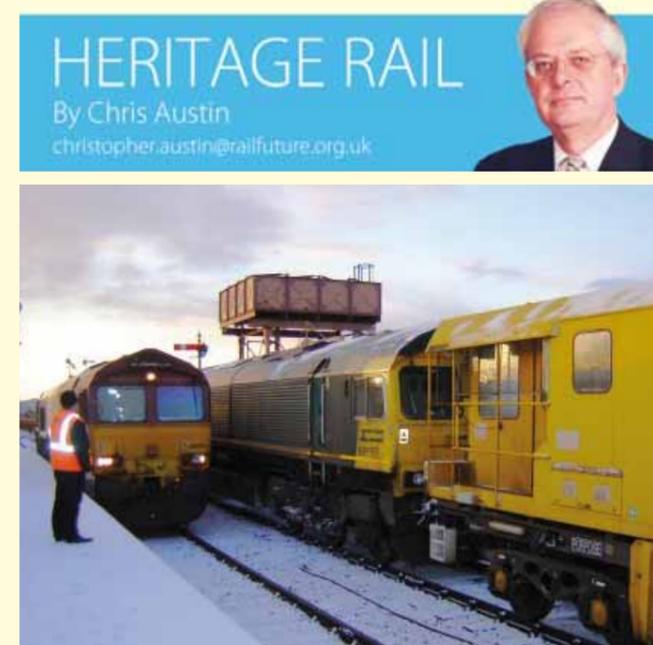
The Wensleydale Railway share appeal is looking for £2 million to extend trains beyond Leeming Bar to Northallerton, and to extend westwards from Redmire, as well as to improve line capacity, workshop accommodation and stations.

Freight

The West Somerset Railway has just completed a contract to move more rock armour from the Mendip quarries to Minehead where the sea defence works are being extended eastwards.

Some 20 trains have already run, keeping 30,000 tonnes of traffic off the roads. On 17 December, no fewer than three freight trains arrived from the main line network in blizzard conditions - the stone train for Minehead, the regular visit of Network Rail's high output ballast cleaner and a train bringing in second-hand rails for the WSR.

Devon & Cornwall Railways, the Iowa Pacific subsidiary, has been granted a freight



HEAVY HAUL: Stone train, left, on the WSR passes Network Rail's ballast cleaner at Bishop Lydeard in December

operator's licence by the Office for Rail Regulation. According to DCR president Ed Ellis, it aims to become "an effective, responsive operator focused on atypical and innovative flows in the UK railfreight market." Its affiliate, the Weardale Railway, has started work on preparing the coal terminal at Wolsingham, and secured agreement with Network Rail on the method of operation between the two systems at Bishop Auckland.

Removal of spoil by train from Imberhorne cutting on the Bluebell was expected to restart in February or March.

New link

The Ecclesbourne Valley Railway plans to reopen the rest of the former Wirksworth branch on 8 April. This will add a link of 8.5 miles to the national network at Duffield, where EVR trains will connect with East Midlands Trains to and from Derby.

Picture: DAVID HOLMES