

## East Anglia

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### Community tidy-up

Twenty local volunteers organised by Fenland District Council and working alongside representatives from National Express East Anglia and Network Rail, tidied up part of the disused platforms at March station. Further clean-up events are planned and it is hoped to provide new planters around the station. The initiative helped create a good impression for both the railway and March.

### Better buses at Huntingdon

Local bus operator Stagecoach and train operator First Capital Connect have responded to comments about the lack of promotion of improved bus services at Huntingdon Station. There are now posters advertising the new service around the station including a large floor map in the ticket office showing the bus link. The operators are also working on through ticketing and St Ives should shortly re-appear as a rail destination!

### More station counts

The latest station count carried out by the branch has taken place at Newmarket station with help from the local rail user group. Branch members were at the station all day from first to last train recording the number of passengers boarding and alighting. The branch was also able to record the number of cycles being taken on to trains and the use of the station car park. The results have been sent to National Express East Anglia and local authorities along with a list of simple improvements that could be made to the station.

### MPs respond to East-West Rail leaflet

The majority of the region's MPs have responded to the Railfuture East-West Rail Link leaflet. MPs from all parties are supportive of the scheme although they recognise the problems of finding funding. Many thanks to all those who sent their MP the postcard that came with the leaflet.

### Woodbridge

A smart new bus shelter in the Woodbridge rail station forecourt has remained without buses as local operators are refusing to use it. However, on Thursdays and Saturdays from mid July to the end of August, it will be used by the open-top bus which takes visitors around Woodbridge and Melton and out to historic Sutton Hoo.

The East Suffolk Travellers' Association has helped sponsor this bus and timetables are available from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ, or email.

In early July a demand-responsive minibus link from Woodbridge to Bawdsey (also calling at Sutton Hoo approach road and other villages) is also to start, and ESTA has been advised that this will also use the station bus stop if any passenger wants to board or alight there.

### Service downgraded

Press reports suggest the controversial withdrawal of restaurant cars on Norwich-London trains was agreed between National Express East Anglia and the Department for Transport in order to increase overall seating capacity.

Now NXEA is also seeking changes in its service level commitment on the Ipswich-Bury St Edmunds-Peterborough and Ipswich-Lowestoft routes. The East Suffolk Travellers' Association is concerned that this could mean reductions to, or even withdrawal of, the popular Lowestoft-London through trains and has made strong representations accordingly.

The European Passengers Federation's 2010 conference and AGM will be on 20 March in Malmo, Sweden. In 2011 it will be Barcelona.



## Railcards

Railcards have been around for a number of years. Presumably they are meant to be advantageous to both passengers and train operators.

I had a Network SouthEast card for many years; there were restrictions on peak time travel which was reasonable. A problem was that after a while a "minimum fare" was introduced. Originally this was, I think, £8 but has been increased, most recently this May to £13 (similar increases were applied to young persons and HM forces cards).

Just to be clear what this means: although a discounted fare should be available, the minimum fare payable with a network card is £13. To put this in context, on my most used line, Thameslink, the card can only be used to any advantage for day returns to London from Harlington and beyond. That is 37 miles from St Pancras: any time and any weekday.

If longer journeys are not likely there is little point in buying such a card, unless travel is restricted

# Your letters extra

to weekends, complete with engineering works. I now have a senior card so am not (yet) subject to such restrictions.

Why do the train operators do this? More importantly why do the inept and impotent regulators let them get away with it?

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## Regions or branches?

Railfuture's Who's Who lists 16 regional contacts. Our website refers both to regional groups and to local branches. Our articles of association refer to branches.

Would it help us, and especially in terms of the way others see us, if we chose one rather than the other? Some of us are beginning to think so. Region is perhaps more descriptive and gives a clearer pointer to its level and scope within the organisation than branch which leaves those questions unresolved.

Before proposing a special resolution to the 2010 AGM, we would like to sound out the membership on the idea of having regions rather than branches. We fully understand that Scotland and Wales may well have particular views which would need to be

accommodated. Does London & South East's local divisional sub-structure, for example, offer a possible model for Wales with its three current components?

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## Operator is right

Different types of rolling stock are referred to in John Friedberger's March article for the Wessex branch. I must say that I think South West Trains has the balance right between high and low density seating on the Portsmouth via Guildford line.

I know that people at Portsmouth (represented by our Wessex branch) want all trains to be class 444 with their 2+2 seating, but people at Guildford want to get a seat, which at peak times is generally possible only on the class 450 with their 2+3 higher-density seating.

Overall SWT get similar numbers of complaints each way, so I think its policy of running just two services each way with class 444 in the peaks is correct. The regular passengers soon get to know which to catch from Portsmouth and which to avoid at Guildford. Something

else I would recommend, from travels in Germany last year, is to have more sophisticated ticket machines like Deutsche Bahn has, which can do reservations and advance bookings.

Yet another useful facility I spotted, in Switzerland as well as Germany, for use on lines with request stops, is trains with request stop buttons like on buses, to save you having to go and find the guard to request a stop. I was told in Switzerland that there is also a stop button for passengers on the station.

But Germany was very clear on its penalties, higher than in Britain, for travelling without a ticket, with prominent warning notices on the insides and outsides of local rural trains.

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## Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU  
 Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk  
 Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures  
 Please use email if possible

## Wessex

By John Friedberger

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### CrossCountry issues

The branch AGM was held on 21 March, as last year, in Bournemouth. Our guest speaker was Julia Mapp, public affairs manager for Arriva CrossCountry. Julia explained the scope of CrossCountry operations since the start of the franchise in 2007. These are constrained by the specification laid down by the Department for Transport and the problems of obtaining more rolling stock. Points of interest included: refurbishment of all Voyager trains, acquisition of five eight-coach high-speed trains, and new Cardiff-Nottingham and Birmingham-Standed Airport services. Julia explained CrossCountry's advice to avoid changing trains at Birmingham New Street where practical and the reasoning behind removal of Voyager shops and their replacement by "at seat catering". The latter move and the new truncated network were not generally welcomed by Railfuture members but Julia mentioned that the company's future plans, although not yet agreed by the DfT, include the extension of some Reading services to the south coast so restoring better access to north-east England. We place a high priority on this direct connection, which should also extend to Scotland.



## Blinkered view of

### Book Review

*New Wealth for Old Nations* is one of those expensive collections of essays that university librarians stock so enterprising students – in this case of town planning, economics and geography – can harvest it for citations to impress their tutors.

Unfortunately such works may also serve as a quarry of quotes for avaricious consultants and policy wonks to flaunt "innovative, blue-sky thinking", such as replacing railway lines by buslines. And hence justify a fat fee, with perhaps a contract to build a busway later.

Given that New Labour is in thrall to American academics, the presence of a former Scottish minister of transport in this book's editorial team is worrying.

In addition to many serious contributions – not necessarily of interest to public transport activists – the book includes an essay *Four Challenges for Scotland's Cities* (pages 73-95) by the Harvard economist Edward L Glaeser arguing for growth through car-driven sprawl and neglecting the railway system. Curiously, this is exactly what

New Labour appears to be implementing in England rather than Scotland, with the so called eco-towns – for the most part rail-less ex-urban developments.

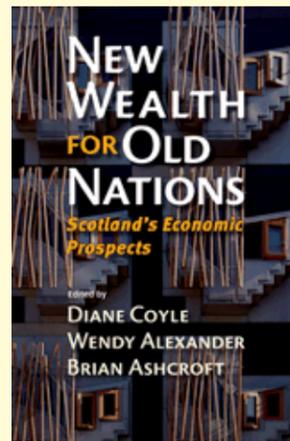
A flavour of Glaeser's Atlanticist auto-imperialism can be conveyed by a couple of quotations.

"If non-car alternatives continue to be pushed, then at least these alternatives should focus on buses, which are cheap and flexible, rather than rail, which is expensive and inflexible."  
 "There is nothing that can be done with intra-city rail that cannot be done with a bus and a dedicated lane or tunnel at much lower cost." (ibid p. 93)

"Finally, since cars are the future, urban success requires regulating the car. The most successful strategy against congestion will surely be to follow London's lead and adopt congestion charges." (ibid p. 94)

However, Vukan R Vuchic in *Urban Transit: Systems and Technology* (reviewed previously in *Railwatch*) argues that the assertion that buses (as opposed to rail modes such as trains and trams) "are flexible so that their routes can be easily changed and that they can operate better in mixed traffic than on a fixed right of way" (2007:

## 'eco' future



257) is a misconception." Both systems require a dedicated right of way, if flow is to be free, and this is going to be difficult with buses in say central Cambridge or Leeds.

The alternative of pricing out the motorist has already been rejected by the electorate in Manchester. One wonders whether the previous reluctance of the Government to invest in simple railway electrification schemes and already-planned tramways is solely due to the Olympics or, whether pushing decisions back beyond 2014, when the pledge to maintain the existing network expires, has more to do with misguided aspirations to replace substantial parts of the railway system with a combination of guided busways and car toll-protected on-street bus routes.

Coyle D, Alexander W, and Ashcroft B, Eds (2005) *New Wealth for Old Nations: Scotland's Economic Prospects*, Princeton University Press £45.50.

## Report is ready

The full report of Railfuture's conference in London in November is now available.

The successful conference – a brief report appeared in *Railwatch* in December – included presentations from Green Party leader Caroline Lucas, Eurostar communications director Simon Montague, Green-gauge 21's Julie Mills, high-speed rail promoter Colin Elliff, Luton MP Kelvin Hopkins, Railway Forum chairman Chris Green, Association of Train Operators public affairs chief Chris Austin, the Rail Freight Group's Tony Berkeley and tram-trains expert Professor Lewis Lesley.

Those who attended should get a free copy included in their conference fee but if you were unable to attend but would like to receive a copy of the report, please send a cheque for £2 (made out to Railfuture) to Trevor Jones, 67 Guildford Park Avenue, Guildford GU2 7NH.

### Lymington ferry and connections at Brockenhurst

We held our April committee meeting in Lymington and were able to see the controversial new ferries recently introduced by Wightlink. From the foot passenger's point of view, the journey between west Wight and the mainland centres of Bournemouth and Southampton has been made much more difficult. This is a serious problem for elderly and disabled passengers. They can only board or disembark from the new ferries at Yarmouth through the vehicle ramp (with obvious safety issues). Steps between the decks are steep, the ferries' new schedules do not tie up with train times at Lymington Pier and it is still almost impossible for a wheelchair user or infirm person to reach the Southampton-bound platform at Brockenhurst station. Lifts are planned but the Wessex branch puts them high on our list of needed improvements.



### Top 10 improvements

In response to a request from South West Trains at one of the regular meetings we hold through the good offices of Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus link manager, we presented a list of improvements that passengers would like to see implemented. Not all would cost money. Top of the list is capacity and rolling stock, specifically not to use trains with 3+2 seating on services longer than one hour or 50 miles. We would prefer 3+2 seating to be eliminated altogether and trains to be lengthened so as to provide adequate capacity. In amplification we have submitted a proposal as to the configuration of the 140 new coaches which we understand (and hope) are soon to be ordered for SWT.