

MINUTES OF MARPA AGM HELD ON 21st APRIL 2018 at 2pm at FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, ST JOHN'S STREET, BURY ST EDMUNDS

Present: 14 including 6 committee members

1. *Welcome, introductions & apologies*

The chairman welcomed members and guests

Apologies: Trevor Garrod, Bryan Moss, Ross Taylor, Ben Walsh, Roger Wolfe

2. *Presentation by Paul Webster, operations manager (south) for ACoRP*

Paul's talk outlined the history of ACoRP, its key strategic role as the national body representing and supporting local Community Rail Partnerships and the wide range of local initiatives ACoRP has overseen all designed to foster engagement between communities and the rail services from which they benefit. He pointed out that since the first CRP was set up in 1994 (the Penistone line in Yorkshire) there had been a huge expansion right across the passenger network. ACoRP currently represents over 80 community rail lines across the UK, in addition to more than 1000 station adoption groups. Some key points:

- The key feature of a CRP was its autonomy from the train operator – even though the operator funded the community rail officer who would act to facilitate engagement and the smooth interaction of the various relevant organisations, the CRP was essentially a community driven not for profit concern serving primarily the interests of passengers and local communities.
- Practical benefit of a flourishing CRP for the train operators – data from research undertaken in 2015 indicates that lines where CRPs are in place can show a growth in passenger numbers nearly 3% greater than on lines where no CRP is in existence.
- Examples of where the existence of the CRP benefits the communities along a given line - through supporting local businesses to set up cafes in redundant station buildings (e.g. Beccles, Wickham Market, Melton); encouraging the green-fingered to adopt stations and enhance the immediate environment through gardening schemes (e.g. Bures); working with schools and colleges on art projects to help enliven station infrastructure (e.g. the vibrant murals in the subway at Manningtree); working with the train operator to promote off-peak travel for identified segments of the market (e.g. "bucket & spade" services for families Colchester-Walton).
- The presentation made it very apparent that CRPs afforded a very wide range of volunteering opportunities, both to established groups and organisations (gardening clubs, man sheds, schools etc) as well as to ad hoc groups set up as a consequence of the CRP. The scope for involvement was only limited by the energies and imaginations of those participating.
- Linked to this was the high level policy view from the DfT that one of the key drivers for each CRP should be the achievement of tangible social goals, with a particular stress on social inclusion; there was an opportunity to use the resource provided by the CRP to involve under-represented groups in using the railway, both for travel and as a local community resource.

- Regarding the funding required to set up and maintain a CRP, Paul pointed out that whereas in the early days of CRP development the onus had been on the relevant local authorities, the balance had now shifted so that DfT money, provided via funding to the train operating companies, constituted the bulk of the necessary capital.

The most pressing question posed by the presentation for the AGM audience was just when Greater Anglia as train operator would get around to instigating moves towards a CRP on the Mid Anglia line. The strong feeling of the meeting in discussion following Paul's presentation was that Marpa should re-engage with the operator to signal our enthusiasm for the development. Some of the "grass roots" elements of a functioning CRP were already operating on the line – a number of stations for instance already benefited from the work of station adopters, and Marpa itself (through the efforts of member R. Wolfe) had already published a set of 15 walks that exploited various stations on the route as start/finish points. The line is one of three remaining non-CRP linked services operated by GA, and given its large and growing passenger footfall it is right that the operator makes clearer its own timescale for bringing together interested parties.

3. *Questions and answers*

Much of the Q & A was focussed on implementation issues for a local CRP, but there was also discussion of the role a CRP might play in supporting the train operator in its dementia strategy to ensure that station audits etc properly took account of the need of dementia sufferers alongside the more visible needs of other disabled groups. In the same vein the issue of the readability of signage for travellers suffering e.g. from cataracts was raised. The poor state of access to Thurston station, especially at night, was also highlighted, and it was identified as one of the many very practical facets of the rail infrastructure where a vigorous CRP could probably get results.

4. *Presentation by members of Needham Market access for all campaign group (Wendy Marchant & Jen Overett)*

Wendy and Jen gave a presentation which dovetailed neatly with what the audience had heard about the potential benefits of a CRP in the previous agenda item. They outlined the pressing problem at Needham – the fact that a wide range of passengers have difficulties accessing the Ipswich-bound platform due to the barrier posed by 49 steps up and down, and disabled passengers with mobility challenges are unable to access the platform at all. Having given a brief outline of the history of efforts to rectify the situation, they updated the meeting on exciting recent developments, including their visit in March to the Department for Transport to present a petition to Chris Grayling as secretary of state. The petition is associated with a dedicated Facebook page and they are currently looking to add further signatures so it reaches at least 2000 names. A further meeting of the campaign group late in May will involve Jo Churchill, the local MP who has taken an interest in the situation at Needham station, together with campaigners, local government officers and representatives from GA and Network Rail. The aim currently is to submit a bid for necessary funding to the next round of Access for All (Network Rail budget), but also to investigate other potential funding sources and undertake local fund raising in support of any bid. Members attending who hadn't already signed the petition did so.

5. *Report of 2017 AGM (22/04/17)*

Approved (Proposed D. Webb, seconded P. Rutt)

6. *Matters arising*

None

7. *Chairman's Report 2017/18*

The report was tabled at the meeting. Arising from the report the meeting expressed some concern that the recently completed traffic management works along the Tayfen Rd/Northgate axis in Bury did not appear to have improved the situation for pedestrians going to and from the station, in that the installed Toucan crossing on Tayfen Rd was nowhere near Ipswich Street, which is where the great bulk of foot traffic between the station and the town centre crosses Tayfen Rd. It was agreed that Marpa would write to the local press and P. Feeney agreed to draft a response for J. Drake to send. Report approved, proposed by A. Romano and seconded by J. Matthissen.

8. *Treasurer's Report*

The report was tabled at the meeting and presented by P. Rutt as treasurer. Accounts were in a healthy state, although it appeared membership was down on 2017. Website management fees had halved. The GDPR regulations were briefly outlined and the meeting was reassured that Marpa was fully compliant. The report was approved. Proposed by J. Matthissen and seconded by P. Wakefield.

9. *Election of chair*

J. Drake was re-elected unopposed. Proposed and seconded by P. Wakefield and P. Rutt respectively. All in favour.

10. *Election of officers & committee 2018/19*

Current committee re-elected unopposed. Two current vacancies remain unfilled. Proposed and seconded by J. Matthissen and A. Romano respectively.

11. *Any other business*

Further brief discussion of the CRP situation, in the light of an email from GA received by the chairman. There was support from the meeting for the idea that MSDC be approached to establish its interest in the development of a CRP for the service. Four of the communities served by stations on the line lie within the district council's boundaries. Other directly relevant authorities are West Suffolk and East Cambs.

Meeting closed at 4.25pm