

MINUTES OF MARPA AGM HELD ON 13th APRIL 2019 at 2pm at FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, ST JOHN'S STREET, BURY ST EDMUNDS

Present: 28 including 7 committee members

1. *Welcome, introductions & apologies*

The chairman welcomed members and guests

Apologies: Matt Brennan (Network Rail), Trevor Garrod, Ross Taylor, Roger Wolfe, Ann Henderson, Robert Stripe, Alan Cocker.

2. *Presentation by Alan Neville, Greater Anglia Community & Customer Engagement Manager*

The original intention for the AGM was to introduce speakers from Greater Anglia as the train operating company and Network Rail as the organisation responsible for all significant railway infrastructure. Although the invited speaker from NR was regrettably unable to attend, AN used a short PowerPoint presentation provided by MB to address some key aspects of NR's plans for Control Period 6 (up to 2024).

(a) Network Rail plans

Spending plans on major infrastructure are now confirmed for the period to 2024. Just over £2 billion is available for projects in East Anglia, split between routine maintenance and renewal across the network and major new track and signalling projects at Cambridge, Clacton & Colchester. Significant renewal work is also scheduled at Liverpool Street station. It is likely that track renewal work on the mid-Anglia route will be focused on Stowmarket, where under the Access for All scheme funding is also committed in the control period for building lifts making access for all users easier between the platforms. The scheme at Stowmarket is the only successful Access for All bid in the current round on the GA network.

Three key projects directly relevant to Marpa and the passenger groups it serves were also highlighted – track doubling at Haughley Junction; Ely area track and signalling improvements; re-building a station at Soham, between Ely and Bury St Edmunds. Unfortunately, although each project has attracted significant support from a variety of key partners, both within and outside the rail industry itself, no precise funding commitments have yet been made. Whilst it is possible that work on one or more of them could yet begin within the current control period – particularly at Soham, where significant funding is to be provided by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority – these projects are not costed and confirmed in the way that those mentioned in the previous paragraph are.

The most significant driver for investment in rail in the region is the continued growth of Cambridge. Passenger numbers at Cambridge and the recently opened Cambridge North stations are now annually just over twelve million, making it the second busiest east of England hub after Liverpool Street. Footfall has risen by 25% since 2013, a trend certain to continue. To address growing demand, the Cambridge Corridor Study has identified the need for additional platforms at the station as well as doubling track on the Coldhams Lane – Newmarket section as part of ensuring readiness for the arrival of East West Rail. The issue of doubling from Newmarket – very pertinent to Marpa members – is bound up with several factors, including best

estimates of traffic growth arising from further development westwards from Cambridge along the “corridor” (including Newmarket & Bury St Edmunds) and the position to be taken by the East West Rail Co. regarding its eastern section operations from Ipswich and Norwich. The assumption is that a robust case from them for infrastructure enhancements such as Newmarket section doubling and Haughley Junction improvements, that would enable passenger services from Ipswich to reach Bedford and points west via Cambridge, would in all likelihood meet a sympathetic response from government. Equally, the impression given is that none of this is likely to happen within the next five years.

Points arising from questions and answers on this section of the presentation included:

- Concern expressed at the timescales being considered in NR’s planning – e.g. track doubling around Newmarket by 2043. AN made the point that NR’s budget from the Department for Transport is tightly controlled and cannot hope to satisfy all expectations within a given budgetary period. However as circumstances change so strategic priorities can be adjusted – housing and related economic growth in the region could well lead to re-consideration of some of the timescales. In the first instance this is a challenge to be addressed by local and national government
- It was acknowledged that digital signalling could overcome some of the current logistic constraints in terms of train frequency. However this represents a significant resource investment and is unlikely to occur on mid-Anglia lines in the near future.
- AN emphasised that the relationship between GA as passenger train operator and NR as responsible body for control of the whole network could be a challenging one, but that co-operation between the two was constantly improving and both agreed that the safety and efficiency of the railway for passengers and staff was the number one priority.

(b) Greater Anglia plans

AN provided a detailed and upbeat outline of the progress GA is making in its franchise, scheduled to run to 2025. The parent company Abellio (a division of Dutch State Railways) had just been successful in winning the East Midlands rail franchise, meaning it now has a stake in the majority of the passenger rail franchises operating in Great Britain. Within the term of the current East Anglian franchise GA is committed to spending approximately £2 billion on new rolling stock and improvements to the passenger experience in terms of station facilities, including enhancements to information and ticketing. In terms of the new rolling stock, he underlined the point that with the fleet fully operational from late 2020 passengers would be using trains fully air conditioned, single class, with wi-fi throughout, much improved accessibility (tested through liaison with relevant groups) and with a guaranteed minimum of three cars, thus easing capacity concerns. A number of the bi-mode trains which will operate all regional services in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire are already on trial in the region, and the first of the bigger 12 car intercity/Stansted Express trains has also arrived for testing and crew training.

A start will be made in May 2019 to meet the franchise commitment of “Norwich in 90” as championed by the GEML action group convened by relevant members of parliament. Initially two trains a day in each direction will meet this schedule, with more meeting the requirement from 2020. At some point between now and

December 2020 a start is also likely to be made on the introduction of a through service from Norwich to Stansted.

Looking at service performance statistics, he argued that reliability and punctuality overall were improving, with increased rolling stock reliability and better liaison with NR, whilst accepting that work remained to be done on routes such as mid-Anglia. So although overall punctuality was now better than for two decades, at 87% punctuality on mid-Anglia was lagging behind performance elsewhere on the GA network. A specific issue identified was that of patients from Fulbourn Hospital on the outskirts of Cambridge accessing the rail line and constituting a hazard for themselves and others. In terms of timetables and schedules, AN identified the potential for some adjustments to timings and speeds with the introduction of the new fleet, but stressed that the December 2020 timetable re-write would realistically provide the earliest opportunity for such adjustments. Regarding the franchise commitment to introduce an hourly Ipswich – Peterborough service, he suggested that a start might be made by achieving that service pattern at weekends initially, but was not prepared to put a start date to this.

He highlighted the introduction of the carnet-style GA Flexipass from April 2019 as an example of the proactive way in which GA was responding to changing patterns of commuter travel – it would enable passengers from most East Anglian stations travelling to London to purchase up to 50 peak or off peak tickets at discounted prices without committing to specific days for travel.

Regarding Community Rail Partnerships, he acknowledged that the development of such a partnership for the mid-Anglia line, an initiative strongly supported both by Marpa and by Railfuture East Anglia, remained work in progress. He accepted that the mid-Anglia route is now in a small minority on the GA network not to benefit from the work of a dedicated CRP and aimed to get an update on discussions between GA and the relevant local authorities (Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) which he would share with Marpa in due course. He recognised the readiness of Marpa and its members to assist in helping bring a mid-Anglia CRP into existence. On a more positive note, AN highlighted the impact of station adopters in helping to enhance the environment of stations and the facilities on offer. Each adopter had an annual budget of £200 to spend per station. New adopters had recently started work at Stowmarket and Newmarket. Already 95 stations on the network had an adopter in place.

Points arising from questions and answers on this section of the presentation included:

- A question was posed about the news that the proposed Snoasis development at Great Blakenham was allocating a significant sum to rail enhancements at Stowmarket, and whether this would have had a bearing on Stowmarket's success in the Access for All bidding process. AN thought not.
- The readability of some of the screens on the new ticketing machines and information boards was raised (Sudbury, Kennett). AN would investigate.
- A similarly local and practical question was posed about the absence of an electronic information board from the Ipswich platform at Elmswell, despite the fact that a post was installed summer 2018.
- Regarding station car park expansion at Bury St Edmunds, AN was unsure about precise plans. He was aware of a wish to expand provision by up to 27 spaces, but was unable to comment on progress, other than to say that

planning permission was a pre-requisite of such schemes and elsewhere on the network (e.g. Whittlesford) such permission had been denied.

- He confirmed that on the new train fleet serving the mid-Anglia route there would be space for up to six cycles.
- In terms of the new timetable – whenever it eventually appeared – a plea was made for later last trains in both directions between Cambridge and Ipswich.
- Again, a plea was made for additional services to address increased demand associated with specific sporting or cultural events. The Guineas meeting at Newmarket race course was cited. AN mentioned the existing precedent, increased services from Cambridge to Duxford (for the air museum) and recognised the scope for such additionality. He informed the meeting that ongoing meetings with the racing industry were taking place.

3. *Report of 2017 AGM (21/04/18)*

Approved (Proposed B. Walsh, seconded P. Rutt)

4. *Matters arising*

None

5. *Chairman's Report 2018/19*

The report was tabled at the meeting. There were no questions.

6. *Treasurer's Report*

The report was tabled at the meeting and presented by P. Rutt as treasurer. Accounts were in a healthy state, and it appeared membership was stable after a dip from 2017. Items continued to be disseminated via Twitter and the twice yearly newsletter issued to members and published on Marpa noticeboards at staffed stations continued to summarise key developments on the railway as they directly affected users of the mid-Anglia service. The report was approved. Proposed by A. Romano and seconded by P. Hulbert.

7. *Election of chair*

J. Drake was re-elected unopposed. Proposed and seconded by D. Webb and B. Walsh respectively. All in favour.

8. *Election of officers & committee 2019/20*

Current committee re-elected unopposed. A previous committee member, Keith Jobson, was willing to stand again, leaving a single vacancy. Proposed and seconded by B. Walsh and P. Hulbert respectively.

9. *Any other business*

A vote of thanks was proposed for P. Rutt's work on the newsletter. A second vote was proposed for Wendy Marchant, a longstanding member as well as a widely respected councillor on MSDC, representing Needham Market, who is standing down from the council after nearly forty years of outstanding public service. Both were endorsed unanimously. A question was asked about the art centre at Bury station (Smith's Row), which had been wound up as a going concern some while ago.

Concern was expressed regarding liability for the station and responsibility for ensuring its longer term economic viability. This was an issue which the Bury Society took seriously. Representation from Marpa on the group concerned with the station and its future would be welcomed. It was suggested that if any present had further questions for Network Rail in the light of the earlier presentation they should be addressed to J. Drake as chair, who would ensure they were passed on to Matt Brennan at Network Rail.

Meeting closed at 4.05pm