

## **SUFFOLK LTP NOVEMBER 2024: MARPA CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

MARPA is the rail user group serving the routes between Ipswich and Cambridge and Ipswich and Peterborough. As well as individuals in membership we also have eight town and parish councils, from Newmarket in the west to Needham Market in the east, as corporate members.

The draft LTP has been discussed by our committee and this response has been written as a result. Section One addresses the LTP document, whilst Section Two looks at the area plans considered most relevant to MARPA.

### **SECTION ONE: LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN**

Overall: our view is that there is too little evidence of practical, workable strategies to deliver on aspirations for zero carbon, modal shift, more active travel, vehicle emissions reductions & improved air quality. Whilst we fully support the aspirations identified in the draft LTP, our concern is that the relatively few and modest proposals contained in the document are very unlikely to make a meaningful contribution by 2040 to the various challenges the LTP rightly identifies.

As a very specific illustration: the Thurston Area document for example identifies 8% current take up of active travel/use of public transport in the locality against a target figure of 35%. The target is well over four times the current rate. The document states "we will encourage walking and cycling trips" but has nothing to say about how the envisaged transformation in the way people make short journeys will be achieved. Nothing proposed in the LTP or in the area plan comes anywhere near providing the step change measures essential for that radical degree of change in people's travelling behaviour.

So, whilst we endorse the ambition and agree fully with the strategic objectives of the draft LTP, we feel that the various measures identified will in themselves be insufficient to make the difference that is so urgently required.

In terms of its treatment of rail as a key part of the solution if transport is to become zero carbon, MARPA considers that the draft LTP is just not bold enough in advocating for significant change in terms of services and facilities. MARPA recognises that SCC is not funded to support either infrastructure or operations, but as the statutory transport authority it has considerable influence and leverage with the rail industry. The LTP provides an excellent opportunity for SCC to set out its asks of rail in contributing to transport zero carbon. MARPA hopes at least some of the

specific recommendations that follow will feature in any subsequent version of the LTP.

- The draft LTP makes obvious strategic points supporting EACE/Haughley Junction, however there is nothing about expanding passenger rail services to exploit current & future demand – and assist modal shift
- Key omission – support for eastward extension of EWR from Cambridge makes no explicit reference to re-doubling the Newmarket branch, which is essential if service patterns are to be increased
- The document gives no consideration to scope for new stations on routes within Suffolk, despite forecast population growth & significant housing development to 2040 and beyond – the least MARPA would expect in the LTP is a readiness to scope the feasibility of potential new stations, as NCC has done recently
- Explicit support from SCC for the rail operator to capture demand is largely absent from the document – e.g. Later services? More frequent services? Extend current CBG-IPS both east and west (e.g. Cambridge South-Felixstowe)?
- In the context of real encouragement for modal shift, the LTP should consider piloting an integrated ticketing model involving GA & bus operators on a specific Suffolk route
- With a third Suffolk CRP becoming operational in the immediate future, SCC should consider developing a strategic plan to use them jointly to investigate barriers to public transport take up & promote rail with the older car users identified as least likely to adopt passenger transport as a viable travel option
- Linked to the last point, on the crucial theme of modal shift, MARPA feels that SCC should be working actively with TE, NCC & ECC to devise & deliver a regional strategy for increasing ridership on services paralleling key trunk routes – A12, A14, A140 – by identifying and addressing perceived barriers to using rail
- MARPA strongly supports references in the LTP to developing travel hubs at stations; the document should however go further, and consider feasibility studies to review the scope of such a hub development at every station
- We also support the explicit reference to the current Access for All deficit identified at four Suffolk stations – but the LTP says little about how SCC can work with other partners to help address this
- The planning system should be adapted to include active travel links to the nearest railway station/ travel hub for all major developments, plus the gradual development of such waymarked links and improvements from existing settlements: a plan should be drawn up with District Councils and Ipswich Borough to implement such links
- The Suffolk Rail Prospectus is referenced in the LTP, but it is now nearly a decade old and MARPA believes the document is urgently in need of an update, not least to allow a dialogue between relevant partners over how rail in Suffolk can most effectively contribute to the four key needs identified through the LTP

- One big gap in the overall strategy outlined in the draft LTP is the absence of a Zero Carbon Transport Champion – an individual committed to a comprehensive change agenda and identified as the focal point for challenge and debate; MARPA believes that the lack of such a figure leaves the strategy informing the LTP insufficiently high profile and in consequence unlikely to make the required impact to 2040 and beyond

## **SECTION TWO: AREA PLANS & RAIL**

- Passenger facilities on the Mid Anglia route – in terms of "asks" SCC should be making via the LTP of the train operator, the following modest enhancements merit explicit focus:

1. a westbound waiting room is needed at Bury, an increasingly busy travel hub;
2. current shelters at Elmswell and Thurston are shabby and uncomfortable, especially in comparison with better constructed facilities at Kennett;
3. the small eastbound platform shelter at Needham is not DDA compliant on a very exposed embankment platform

- In **Bury**, the local plan says nothing about the current very unsatisfactory arrangement for walking between the station and the town centre, with the need to cross the busy Tayfen Road adjacent to a roundabout – a longstanding concern to MARPA

- Information re the existing Access for All situation at **Stowmarket** station is seriously inaccurate and should be amended in any revised document

- The **Thurston** area document references work with partners to secure step free access at Thurston station; current access *is* already step free, what is lacking is a *safe way* of crossing the line, which should be identified as an urgent priority

- The Introduction to the **Thurston** document identifies Elmswell and Thurston as being on the *Ipswich-Ely line*, when for most rail users the more accurate and useful designation is *Ipswich-Cambridge*

- The **Thurston** area document makes no reference to Elmswell level crossing – this needs to be recognized as a major local pinch point for road traffic in terms of congestion and air quality, something SCC as the highway authority should be exploring further with Network Rail

- Although the various area plans all reference the need for better integration of public transport, notably bus services and rail, the opportunity is not taken in the **Newmarket** document to highlight the potential benefits of working with partners to explore the feasibility of an express bus service linking Mildenhall with Newmarket station for onward

travel to Cambridge and the hospitals/biomedical campus at Cambridge South.