

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association (MARPA)

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Autumn / Winter 2008 Newsletter

Welcome to the autumn 2008 MARPA newsletter. It has been a long summer off school for my son after taking his GCSEs. He is a keen birdwatcher so to get him out of the house I looked at the Traveline East Anglia website to try to plan a journey to a bird reserve using public transport. As the Suffolk coast is nearest we looked at the Minsmere/Dunwich area but this was a 4 hour journey involving 2 or 3 buses from Ipswich and the nearest he could get was Westleton or Leiston. I know you can book a Coastlink bus, but this involves a degree of pre-planning (two days notice) that teenagers can't always do. Frustrated at getting on public transport to the wilder parts of the Suffolk coast we looked at North Norfolk. Cley Marshes can be reached by train from Stowmarket to Norwich, Norwich to Sheringham, then the frequent Coasthopper bus to the door of the reserve visitor centre. This takes under two and a half hours and costs a 16 year old with a Suffolk County Council 'Explore' card an incredibly good £8.50 for the return trip. Visiting nature reserves from our area can be done, for example RSPB Lakenheath is in easy walking distance of the station, and RSPB Titchwell is on the Coasthopper bus route from Sheringham or Kings Lynn.

I travelled up to London last week, the train was clean, on time, staff courteous, at seat trolley service both ways – in fact pretty much a faultless journey. I was surprised therefore to see that there is an on-line petition with disgruntled commuters complaining about NXEA's service. Where I work in Ipswich we use the train frequently, my sons use the train to and from Bury almost daily and I think the service reliability has improved in the past few months. I've been looking for the train service figures on the internet but can't find them. I'll ask NXEA for the figures for the next edition of this newsletter.

Possible New Trains

A recent press statement said that at least 8 dmu vehicles (4 trains?) are out for tender that could work local and mainline services. Rail Future have spoken to NXEA HQ who are tight lipped about the bid as it is at a very delicate stage... so fingers crossed and 3 cheers for NXEA.

Dullingham Afternoon Stops

After many discussions with National Express East Anglia (NXEA) we have finally got to the bottom of why there is a four hour afternoon/early evening gap in stopping services at Dullingham on the Ipswich to Cambridge Services. There is nothing that stops on the service towards Cambridge between 15.20 and 19.20. After receiving chapter and verse from one of NXEA's senior timetable planners it has all become a little clearer! In essence it is in fact all to do with the pattern of services that runs in the opposite direction!

Each train has a limited time that it can spend on the single line section between Chippenham Junction and Cambridge and then back to Chippenham before the next train is due to enter. According to the pattern of trains calling at Dullingham it should be the 16.16 from Ipswich that would fill this four hour gap. However, the train that has to come off the section before this service can enter (16.43 from Cambridge) will have stopped at Dullingham to let the school children and workers off! This then means that the 16.16 cannot get onto the branch early enough to stop at both Newmarket and Dullingham as it needs to get to Cambridge in sufficient time to make a 17.43 return departure. A little confusing eh? NXEA kindly provided MARPA with the working timetable to fully explain the difficulties.

NXEA have stated that with the current tight timetabling there is little they can do. However, if Network Rail can increase the line speed along this stretch then they would have more flexibility and would be prepared to look at this again.

So now you know!

Bury Station Staff

There is good and bad in this article! We have heard from various unconnected sources about the helpful, friendly and patient staff in Bury. MARPA has written to NXEA to pass on this piece of good news. NXEA has indeed responded in terms that they have been trying hard to improve the customer satisfaction levels at Bury and it now appears to be bearing fruit. Almost immediately after passing on this 'pat on the back' we became aware of the two incidents where the station remained closed in the early morning whilst trains were arriving and departing. Apparently the station staff were late in opening up. MARPA accepts that there will always be occasions when staff are poorly and cannot get into work. However, what concerns us is the seemingly lack of staff cover in these circumstances and more worryingly is that passengers were crossing the running lines to access the trains. MARPA has written to NXEA expressing its concern.

What do members (you!) want?

As you know, MARPA exists to protect and promote passenger services on the Ipswich to Peterborough and Ipswich to Cambridge rail lines. The committee meets every other month to discuss issues and to look at areas where it considers it should focus its energies. However, the issues are wide and varied and the committee has limited resources. We therefore need to understand from you as to what issues you consider are important and that should receive our attention. Please let us know by contacting any member of the committee. Contact details are listed elsewhere within this Newsletter.

Aesthetics at Bury Station

MARPA is often in touch with NXEA about the fabric and décor of the station and we are hopeful that a substantial amount of money will be spent on a significant refurbishment in the not too distant future. NXEA tell us that the planning for the work is progressing well through the various financial stages that are required. MARPA has now turned its attention to the platforms and the area in between the running lines where there is now a fine selection of weeds and shrubbery. In short the whole area is a mess and a complete eyesore. Network Rail (NR) has responded to our concern by agreeing to spray the weeds by hand as the train that normally undertakes this task is not able to cover this central piece of ground. We await this work being undertaken. In addition NR has agreed to our request to look at some sort of (semi) permanent flower planters, or similar, to brighten up this area.

Rail Vandalism

MARPA condemns the recent spate of vandalism that occurred around Bury and was very pleased to learn that an arrest had been made. It is beyond belief that anyone could be so stupid as to endanger the safety of rail passengers by placing concrete blocks on the line in, presumably, an attempt to de-rail a train. On one occasion a train did hit the obstruction but thankfully it stayed on the tracks and was able to be brought safely to a halt.

The future?

As mentioned elsewhere we are seeking your views on the areas and topics you think that MARPA should concentrate its efforts. Currently we are, amongst other things;

- Exploring the most cost effective way of setting up our own web-site.
- Joining forces with Railfuture to undertake counts of rail passengers at local stations. We propose to look first at Newmarket where the numbers of passengers appear to have risen dramatically over the past year or so but the facilities at the station are still, in our view, extremely basic. We are also concerned about the often limited capacity of the rolling stock provided on trains to Newmarket on race days.
- We are actively exploring the criteria required for the creation of some form of Community Rail Partnership for this line. We have already spoken to NXEA about this.
- We continue to petition NXEA for the provision of two car trains on all Ipswich to Cambridge services. We are also keen to see an hourly service to and from Peterborough
- We are frequently in contact with Suffolk County Council about the lack of a pedestrian crossing in Fornham Road in Bury between the railway station and Tesco. We are extremely fearful of some-one being seriously injured (or worse!) if something isn't done very soon.

Thanks

MARPA would like to record its thanks to both Clive Morris (NXEA's former Rural Routes Director) and Peter Meades (Public Affairs Manager) for all of their help and support in the past as they move on to pastures new within the company. We wish them every success.

Travel to Heathrow

It is out of our area but you may like to know that National Express has launched a brand new service integrating its rail and airport shuttle businesses to make the journey from Central London to Heathrow Airport simpler. From 28 July, passengers travelling on the company's East Anglia train services into London's Liverpool Street station will be able to pre-book a seat on the [National Express Dot2Dot \(dot2.com\)](https://www.dot2.com) on-demand airport shuttle service, for a more convenient and direct transfer across London.

The new Liverpool Street service joins the Dot2Dot route already linking London King's Cross with Heathrow Airport, providing an easy link for rail passengers using National Express East Coast services to and from the East Midlands, Yorkshire, North East England and Scotland.

Operating as an on-demand service, passengers who arrive in either station will be able to use the direct service to every terminal at Heathrow Airport 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Paul Whitfield, managing director of Dot2Dot said, "Our intention at Dot2Dot has always been to simplify the journey across London for the millions of passengers travelling to and from Heathrow. It's great that we can now extend this service to anybody coming in to Liverpool Street, as well as King's Cross, and give our customers a joined up and more comfortable way of travelling across London to one of the world's busiest airports,"

A journey between King's Cross or Liverpool Street station and London Heathrow costs a maximum of £20 per person with discounts for groups and return journeys - less than half the cost of a taxi and considerably more convenient. Each shuttle is capable of carrying between ten and twelve passengers in comfort and style.

Serving all terminals at Heathrow, the Dot2Dot shuttle offers a more responsible travel choice to its passengers. Each shuttle complies with EU Emission standards and by sharing a single journey with up to nine other travellers this will help reduce an individual's carbon footprint.

Each of Dot2Dot's luxury shuttles has spacious leather seats, air conditioning, and lots of room for baggage to ensure that the journey is stress free and comfortable. The company is currently installing free Wi-Fi across the fleet.

Work at Needham Market

National Express East Anglia has given Needham Market station a new lease of life following a redecoration programme.

The work was undertaken in-house by the train operator's rural buildings team over a number of weeks. The skilled work necessitated great attention to detail, including the architectural details on the decorative Victorian iron work of the canopy columns. In addition to this, the fencing, windows and doors were also all repainted, together with extensive redecoration of the passenger subway and steps to improve the lighting levels in the subway.

The redecoration and maintenance programme has benefitted customers by making the station a lighter, brighter and more pleasant place. The work has really rejuvenated the station, where trains call on an hourly frequency serving both Ipswich and Cambridge.

Anita Miles, National Express East Anglia's Group Station Manager for the Rural Route commented:

'The redecoration work at Needham Market has made a real difference to the station. It has really rejuvenated the station environment and enhanced the experience of our customers when they visit. The station has been given a new lease of life.'

Since the work was completed, Needham Market station has been receiving higher scores than ever before in the monthly service quality surveys, carried out by an independent auditor for the train operator.

Ipswich Station Lift Stalled?

The following piece is from the East Suffolk Travellers Association website. I spoke to Trevor Garrod who would like all users of Ipswich station to write to Ipswich Borough Council to voice their concern that the decision makes the station less accessible to less able travellers.

"Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory" was how ESTA Chairman Trevor Garrod greeted the news that Ipswich Borough Council officers have recommended refusal of planning permission for a passenger lift at Ipswich station. ESTA and other passengers' organisations have been pressing for a lift for 15 years. The original lift was demolished when the line was electrified. Over 2 million passengers use Ipswich station each year and at least 10% of them change trains. The footbridge between the platforms is crowded at busy times and is not easy to use for elderly and disabled passengers and indeed any passengers with a lot of luggage.

The Borough Council refusal of planning permission is on the basis that the station "has local historic and architectural interest." Of course, it is a building of character, but it is not a museum. ESTA has therefore protested to the Borough Planning Officer.

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Our AGM will take place on Saturday 25th April 2009 at Bury St Edmunds library – put this date in your diary now!

Contacting MARPA

If you have any ideas or issues you think we should be aware of, please contact the Hon. Secretary, Ross Taylor, on 01284 703308 (between 7 and 8.30 pm if possible) or e-mail him on rjmtataylor@aol.com

List of Useful Web-Sites

National Rail Timetable

The Network Rail National Rail Timetable can be found at <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/aspx/3828.aspx>

Anyone who knows the table they require can go directly to the PDF file, by substituting 'XXX' for the table number, at <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/timetables/timetables/TableXXX.pdf>

National Express website

The NX website is www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com and can be used to plan local journeys and provide journey check information. Generally the website is useful and well worth a browse if you have not looked at it recently.

Wymondham Station

I personally enjoy browsing www.wymondham-station.com not our line but a well maintained and informative site

MARPA Membership Rates

Membership rates are Adult - £3.50; Family - £4.50. Concessions - £2.50 (Student, over 60 or UB40)

Cheques made payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association' and send to:-

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