

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association (MARPA)

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Edited by Peter Rutt

Tel: 01359 242464

e-mail: peterrutt06@aol.com

February 2009 Newsletter

Welcome to the February 2009 MARPA Newsletter.

MARPA Website - At long last, and some may say it is well overdue, we are constructing our own website. Ably assisted by Lloyd Butler our colleague from Railfuture, and with his own IT company, we are now on the web at www.marpa.org.uk. Although we only have a single holding page at the moment we are discussing the preferred design for the finished article. Hopefully we should have something more substantial in the spring.

Peak or Off-Peak? – It has been queried whether the fares charged on the 08.43 Cambridge to Ipswich service were 'peak' fares or not as quite a bit of confusion has crept in. The 'watershed' time between the different charging rates is officially 08.45 but MARPA was informed that some tickets are being sold in Cambridge at the cheaper rate for this particular train. Enquiries were made of NXEA in London who categorically told us that anything sold before 08.45 would be nothing other than the higher fare. Travellers at Cambridge are again telling us something different! MARPA has again been back to NXEA in London for further clarification. At the time of writing we are still awaiting a reply. We will report the outcome in a future edition.

Restaurant Service on the Main Line – I am sure that many of you saw the various articles in the Press over NXEA's decision to withdraw the restaurant cars from the Norwich to London service. This decision was announced at the same time as NXEA informed the media that they were closing the Norwich telephone ticket booking centre with a significant amount of job losses.

The decision to withdraw the restaurant service is surprising as it is regularly voted as the best like for like service, with other rail companies, in the UK. NXEA now tell us that, contrary to recent reports, the service does not cover its costs, is not a committed franchise obligation and is used by less than 1% of the customers who use the route. However, NXEA has listened to a wide range of customers and stake holders and trials of a proposed new catering service are due to take place during January and February with a proposal that the new offer will be implemented by early March.

In effect NXEA are trying to improve the 'on board' catering service for the majority of customers who use this route. We will report back on the development of this in our next edition.

Ipswich Station Lift – Following the many 'on-off' scenarios over this long awaited project Network Rail has now said that the work is to be undertaken under the Government's multi million pound 'Access for All' programme and that a revised planning application would be submitted to Ipswich Borough Council in the next few months. If the application is successful then the work should hopefully commence in the summer of 2009.

Annual General Meeting – as a reminder, the meeting this year will take place on Saturday 25th April 2009 at Bury St Edmunds Central Library commencing at 2.15 p.m. The main speaker will be from NXEA but to date we have not yet got a name!

Crossing of Fornham Road in Bury – MARPA continues to press Suffolk County Council for the provision of some form of pedestrian crossing in Fornham Road in between the railway station and Tesco. It is only a matter of time before some-one gets seriously hurt, or worse, when trying to cross the road at this very busy junction.

Worst Delay? or do you know better? (Ross Taylor) My younger daughter visited her elder sister in Sheffield during December and spent the weekend with her. Returning home by rail on Sunday 14th December she left South Yorkshire just after 17.00 hours and was due back into Bury at 20.47. All was well as she changed trains at Doncaster and caught the NXEC service to London with the aim of changing at Peterborough for the final leg of her journey home.

Just north of Newark the train ground to a halt with the Conductor explaining that there were signalling problems ahead. In fact, as it transpires, a previous service had pulled down the overhead wires between Newark and Grantham and single line working was being introduced. Her train inched into Newark where two trains were amalgamated and one cancelled. My daughter was told that although they would soon be moving through the

single line section the signallers were allowing seven north bound trains to go through first and there were three trains ahead of them going south!

To cut a long story short, realising that the connections into East Anglia were dwindling my wife and I decided at 21.30 on a Sunday night to drive to Peterborough to meet our daughter. We arrived at 22.30 and twiddled our thumbs until she arrived at 00.25 with the train 5 hours late! It was weird seeing trains arrive at that time of night absolutely packed full of unhappy people! We drove home and arrived back in Bury at 01.30.

In all of my time travelling around the country by train I have never been delayed for this length of time. The worst in my case was nearly three hours late into Penzance in 1975 when a tractor rolled onto the line near Exeter. My daughter was unimpressed when I told her!!

Travel Offers – It is worth remembering Group Save and Plus Bus.

Group Save allows adult three and adult four to travel free if travelling with two fare paying adults off peak. In addition to this group four accompanied children can travel for just £1 each. Further information about this and all other offers can be obtained from the National Express East Anglia web site at

www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com

Plus Bus could cut the cost of your journey to and from the train station for around £2 per day. For more details visit www.plusbus.info

Station to Station Walks – MARPA member Roger Wolfe is in the process of compiling a series of walks between the stations on our line. Roger has drafted a route with map and instructions between each of the stations from Ipswich to Bury. The idea is to catch a train to a designated station and walk to the adjacent station, or further if energetic(!) and then catch the train home.

Roger has now started surveying the stations between Bury and Cambridge although this part is not proving as easy to achieve. Initially we hope to upload Roger's work onto the MARPA website so that anyone can print off the walks and enjoy. We can also keep the walks up to date by amending the website as appropriate. We may then look at sourcing some sponsorship to get some of the walks printed and distributed.

Roger was instrumental in achieving a similar set of walks on the East Suffolk line which have proved extremely popular.

Station Passenger Counts – In conjunction with our colleagues at Railfuture we are planning to assist in the counting of passengers from the first train of the day to the last at various stations so that we are aware of the current situation. We will be starting at Newmarket where we know there has been a huge increase in patronage and we can use this information to press for better facilities at the station and continue with our quest to get two car trains on all services along this route. We are looking at undertaking this count in April, when there will be more daylight and it maybe a few degrees warmer?! If any-one has a few hours to spare, probably during the week, and would like to help, then please contact Peter Wakefield on 01223 352364 or e-mail petawake@yahoo.com

Stowmarket Station - We are monitoring the works being undertaken at Stowmarket to ensure that the accessibility of the station to disabled passengers are not compromised by the relief road works currently underway.

Contacting MARPA

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

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.

MARPA Membership Rates

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

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

Ann Henderson, 48 High Street, Ixworth, Bury St Edmunds, IP31 2HJ
Telephone: 01359 230139