

Marpa

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association
www.marpa.org.uk

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Edited by Peter Rutt

Tel: 01359 242464

e-mail: peterrutt06@aol.com

Winter 2011 Newsletter

Welcome to the Winter 2011 newsletter. I have been considering the relative merits of commuting from Elmswell to Ipswich by train or car as my company is stopping company cars from March 2012 and rail v. road is suddenly a very relevant consideration. One important issue is journey time reliability. Driving is pretty reliable; I would say that 99% of journeys get me to and from work on time. It is not perfect of course, but I've been late a handful of times in 4 years and the A14 investment at the Haughley bends in 2008 has improved the journey no end. My concern is how good is our parallel rail route? The natural reaction of any rail operator will be to prioritise the inter-city route into London over the regional route (more passengers travelling longer distances), the travel updates I listen to on Radio Suffolk on my journey into work would suggest the mid Anglia route might not have a reliability to match road and be subject to cancellation to protect the inter-city route reliability – not that the published statistics will be specific enough for route level. There is a lot to consider but by the next newsletter I'll let you know which way I've chosen and why.

Friends of Bury Station

Marpa, in conjunction with colleagues at National Express and The Bury Society, are in discussions to form a group to look after the interests of the station. For those of you that travel through Bury station you will know that it is becoming really run down. The refurbishment, which is mentioned below, will transform and smarten up the areas that passengers mostly use but the adjoining buildings are basically decaying and are in a very poor state of repair. The station is the Gateway to the town and the 'friends' hope to link in with other like minded groups to seek funds to restore the whole area to something like its former glory. It is hoped that a launch event will take place in the Spring when a call will go out for additional helpers / support. Watch this space.

Refurbishment of Bury Station

When you read this the long awaited work to refurbish the station should have started (due to commence on 21 November). The Booking Hall gets the most attention with the former Red Star parcels office being removed and new access for staff to the ticket office being created. The removal of the former parcels office will create more waiting space and additional seats will be provided. A new ceiling, lights and floor will be installed as well as the whole area being redecorated. New Customer Information Screens will be provided in the Booking Hall as well as on both platforms. A non slip surface will be provided on the steps to the platforms as well as accessible handrails.

The toilets on Platform 2 will be completely 'gutted' and re-built. The CCTV system will be extended to cover all parts of the station and recording will take place 24 hours per day. This work has been promised now for many years and we hope that this time it will actually get done. Fingers crossed.

Dullingham Station

Marpa's Peter Wakefield and Ross Taylor met councillors from Dullingham Parish Council (DPC) on 7th November to discuss the issues at their local station and the potential options to enhance it. We had a very useful meeting although we were rather concerned that they said that they had tried to 'interact' with National Express East Anglia (NXEA) but had received very little support. It was not clear who within NXEA they had been dealing with so we agreed to draw a line in the sand and make contact again afresh. DPC were keen to (again!) become involved in the Station Adopter scheme and would consider planting and maintaining plants to enhance the whole station area. They also offered to salt the platforms during bad weather as this has been neglected in recent years. DPC will contact NXEA direct but Marpa will hold a watching brief on this.

We also mentioned the rail service currently serving the village and agreed that it was pretty poor. Generally the stopping patterns both to and from Cambridge is two hourly and this is extended to a four hour gap between 15.20 – 19.20 on trains heading to Cambridge. We have raised this 'gap' before with NXEA but we are not convinced with the reasons given and will certainly raise it again. We want to see an hourly service provided both here and at Kennett.

It is ironic that Peter and I had to drive to the meeting rather than travel by train as the current service meant waiting hours for a train home afterwards. (Ross Taylor)

New Greater Anglia Franchise

5th February 2012 sees the start of the new short (two and a half year) franchise which is the precursor to a much longer 15 year franchise. The Dutch national rail company Abellio has won the franchise for the shorter franchise and no doubt their aspirations will be to also win the longer one? Only time will tell whether we see improvements on the current franchisee but we are optimistic that we will.

One matter that will change significantly from February is that the train operators will acquire 99 year leases on all of the stations. Currently the train operators only have certain 'rights' over very limited parts of the station with most of the responsibilities remaining with Network Rail. Thus, if funding was available from a third party, for example, some additional cycle stands the operator would still have to get the permission of Network Rail before they could be installed. This will change so decisions can be made at a local level and be made much more quickly.

The Re-opening of Soham Station?

A member has asked what Marpa's policy is on the proposals to re-open the station. The simple answer is that we support it wholeheartedly. We have been in touch with Cambridgeshire County Council and are now fully briefed on the proposals and they know that they can rely on our support. The projected passenger flow report produced understandably says that the re-opening is seen as much more viable should there be an hourly service on the Ipswich to Peterborough route. We would argue that the re-opening should not depend on an hourly service although we have campaigned long and hard, and will continue to do so, for such a service.

Overcrowding

At the last NXEA User Group Forum in London on 11th October Marpa once again raised this issue of overcrowding on certain peak services along our route. We had been pleased that the 07.32 service from Bury to Cambridge had been strengthened to a three car train only to see it cut back to a two car train almost immediately. The reason for this was that at Kennett only two cars can fit on the platform leaving the third car to straddle the passenger crossing causing late arriving passengers to walk along the track around the back of the third car to gain access to the platform. This was not ideal and was almost disastrous when passengers were on the track and facing a freight train heading in the opposite direction. Three car trains were immediately banned from calling at the station and so saw the return of the smaller train. We have been told that the three car trains are to be modified so that the doors on the leading car of the train can be locked so that it can stop beyond the platform, instead of the third car, and so the passenger crossing will not be obstructed.

The 07.23 Bury to Ipswich is still operated by a single carriage unit and it is standing room only on arrival into Ipswich. This continues to be monitored as we campaign for a bigger train. NXEA replied saying they have very little flexibility with the number of diesel units available but they too will keep the matter under review.

Marpa Station to Station Walks

Marpa members recently joined colleagues from the Ramblers Association and the River Gipping Trust to walk the route from Needham Market station to Stowmarket station along the route of the River Gipping. It was a fascinating and hugely enjoyable event and just serves as a reminder that walks between all of the stations along our line are available to download from our website (www.marpa.org.uk). Marpa member Roger Wolfe regularly walks all of the routes and therefore the website is always as up to date as it can be. Why not try a walk some day? Catch a train from your local station to another of your choice and then walk from there to the adjoining one and from there catch the train home.

Walks are not restricted to our line and Roger regularly walks between stations on the East Suffolk line (www.eastsuffolklinewalks.co.uk) and anyone is welcome to join him. For further details please contact Roger on 01473 726649 or e-mail rdandswolfe.2@btinternet.com Enjoy the local countryside and do yourself a power of good in the process!

Marpa Newsletter

The next Newsletter is due to be published in March and it would be really nice to receive articles from all members rather than the same few as at present. If you notice something different, have an 'interesting' rail journey or in fact anything rail related then Peter Rutt, the editor, would be delighted to hear from you.

Number of passengers using Newmarket station UP by 33% in just 30 months

On Thursday September 29th, volunteers belonging to Marpa and Railfuture East Anglia, carried out a footfall count of users of Newmarket station. On that Thursday*, 685 passengers were counted compared to the 452 counted on Thursday April 23rd 2009. This equates to approximately 250,025 users a year - up from 165,000 in 2009. Most users travelled to and from and via Cambridge.

Marpa ascribes much of this increase to the awareness and convenience of the hourly fast service inaugurated in 2005 and the more comfortable trains now used on most services throughout the day.

The volunteers surveyed the facilities at the station. The platform needs lengthening to accommodate 3 car trains, the 'bus-stop' type passenger shelters are of very poor quality. There is no platform seating apart from perches in the shelters. Car parking is very inadequate with all 11 spaces in constant use and evidence of overspill into neighbouring streets. This increasingly busy station overall reflects very poorly as a gateway to this important town.

We call upon the Town Council, the District Council, Suffolk County Council, and the horse racing industry, to urgently come together to address the poor facilities for local and visiting users of the station, as a matter of urgency.

We will hold a site meeting with the relevant authorities to discuss our findings in the New Year.

* Why Thursday? The rail industry tells us that Thursday is the 'average' day of the week for usage of stations.

Marpa Membership

The membership of Marpa is from 1st August to 31 July each year. Currently Marpa does not have the IT capability to send reminders to each and every member when the subscriptions are due other than to issue reminders in this Newsletter. Your membership is valued by us and the subscription is vital if we are to continue to campaign in support of issues that members feel strongly about in relation to our local rail routes etc.

Please renew your 2011 / 2012 subscription by getting in touch with our Membership Secretary (Ann Henderson 01359 230139). Her address is:-

MARPA (Membership)

c/o 48 High Street,

Ixworth,

Bury St Edmunds,

IP31 2HJ

Marpa AGM

The next Annual General Meeting is being planned for May next year in Bury St Edmunds. The final details (venue, speaker etc) will be in the next Newsletter. We hope to see you all there.

WEB SITE REMINDER

A further reminder to visit/use our website www.marpa.org.uk