

Marpa

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

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Spring 2012 Newsletter

Overcrowding and the Footbridge at Kennett

Readers may well be familiar with the significant overcrowding problems that have been experienced on the 07.32 train from Bury to Cambridge during the school terms. This is a very popular train especially with students attending school / college in Cambridge.

The situation necessitated a three car unit being introduced for this service in the early autumn last year. This however immediately highlighted an even bigger and potentially catastrophic problem. The three car unit would not fit with the platform length at Kennett and to cut a very long story short it left the third car of the train straddling the 'barrow crossing' at track level which was the only way of crossing the line. Late comers for the train were then required to walk down the track and around the back of the train to gain access to the platform. It is understood that this unacceptable situation prevailed for just a couple of days until the insurance company, responsible for covering the 'risk' of passengers, ordered the ban on the use of three car trains at Kennett.

So for many more very difficult weeks two car units were again used and the overcrowding seemed to get worse. Marpa was involved in liaising with Users (and parents), who were suffering dreadful conditions on the train, and the local management of the then train operator. The solution clearly was to remove the need to use the barrow crossing. Once established progress was swift (although understandably not swift enough for some users of the train!) and Network Rail have now built a temporary footbridge over the line, where the old signal box was situated, and the barrow crossing has been removed. A permanent footbridge will be installed in due course.

Three car trains are now back on this particular service and conditions inside the train are apparently much improved. It usually takes many months (but usually years!) for any changes to be made on the railway and so credit should go to the local train operator and Network Rail for making the changes required. However most credit should go to the passengers on the train who suffered for so long!

Refurbishment at Bury Station

Users of the station will have seen the changes that the £150,000 refurbishment has brought. The demolition of the old parcels office in the Booking Hall has created more space in which passengers can sit when waiting for their train. The lights have been improved and the floor re-laid. The toilets on Platform 2 have been stripped and re-built and from a security aspect additional CCTV cameras installed. For ease of access the steps to the platforms have been provided with a non slip surface and additional handrails installed. New information screens have also been provided.

It all looks very nice and a vast improvement but, as ever, more needs to be done. Marpa would like to see additional seating provided both in the Booking Hall and on the platforms. The 'Friends of Bury Station' also have aspirations for the building and some of these are mentioned elsewhere.

Revenue Protection

Have you been on a train when the fares were not collected? Did you have to pay or was your ticket checked when the trains were not running and a replacement bus was provided? Marpa is aware that the answer to both of these questions is a unanimous yes and no! Every time someone does not pay their fare then you as train users and a tax payer have to fork out more money. Marpa has continually been pressing for more action in revenue protection and we were pleased when the new operator Greater Anglia stated that this was a high priority. It will be interesting to ask the same questions in a year or so and see if we get a different answer! Let us hope so.

'Friends of Bury Station'

Marpa continues to play a part in the formation of this new organisation and is represented on the 'steering group'. This latter group continues to meet to plan the vision and aspirations of the organisation and also to make preparations for its formal launch.

Ultimately it is hoped that the 'friends' will have strong foundations and can call upon volunteers to help with various requirements in trying to achieve the aspirations agreed. In the short term it is hoped that the area around the station entrance and forecourt can be cleared of litter, and cleaned, and excess foliage removed. Probably more of a longer term plan it is hoped that the canopies over the front entrance and on the platforms can be repaired and repainted and the lights cleaned. Longer term it is an aspiration to refurbish the other station buildings on both sides of the line to be used for either commercial or community use.

The 'friends' will remain as a sub group of the Bury Society who are providing help and support ahead of the launch. The Bury Society is a charity open to everyone who cares about Bury St Edmunds' past, present and future. Its aim is to ensure that the town continues to grow and prosper while remaining a beautiful place to live, work or visit. (www.theburysociety.org.uk)

Increase in Marpa Subscriptions

Sadly, due to the ever increasing costs of stationery, postage, hiring of rooms etc the Committee has reluctantly recommended that we should increase the subscriptions by £1 per annum in each membership category and this will be placed on the agenda for discussion at our forthcoming AGM.

Whilst it could be argued that this change represents a significant percentage increase it will still only be £5 per annum for general membership. For this members will receive three Newsletters each year and know that there is a voice representing them in consultations / deliberations with other related groups including Suffolk Rail Policy Group (Suffolk County Council), Greater Anglia (Train Operating Company), Network Rail, Railfuture, Passenger Focus, Friends of Bury Station, Parish Councils etc.

Marpa Annual General Meeting, Saturday 19th May 2012

This year's AGM will again take place at the Friends Meeting House next to the Library in St Andrew's Street North, Bury St Edmunds commencing at 2.00 p.m. We are delighted to have two speakers both of whom are from Greater Anglia. Clive Morris is Customer Service Manager for this Area and is currently on secondment making preparations for the provision of rail transport for the Olympics. Alan Trett, is our local manager and is closely involved in much of what we do. Clive will update us on the planning for the Olympics and give us a wider overview on the railways in our area whilst Alan will be able to be more specific on local issues. Please put this date in your diary. We do hope that you will be able to join us.

Increase in Traffic, The Future of our Line?

Marpa, as mentioned elsewhere, is represented on many rail related groups and continues to ensure that our line(s) get the best service possible whilst accepting that resources are not infinite. An hourly service to Peterborough from Ipswich is a high priority and this links in with the proposed re-opening of Soham station, which we unquestionably support. We are hopeful that both of these aspects will be a commitment within the longer (15 year) franchise which starts in 2014.

We would also like to see Bank Holiday services reflect the existing Saturday pattern rather than a Sunday. We would like to see the timings of trains on a Sunday reflect those of the rest of the week albeit there may not be quite so many? We have other aspirations which are too numerous to mention here but are no less important and we will be producing a 'shopping list' of things we would like to see over the coming five years or so.

What is clear however is that traffic along our line(s) will continue to grow. We hope the hourly service to Peterborough is included but freight traffic is planned to rise. We have seen Network Rail improve the signalling between Bury and Kennett to increase capacity. The Ipswich Chord (to allow freight trains to continue their journeys across this route without having to reverse in Ipswich Yard) is going through the final stages of planning approval and we saw the Chancellor of the Exchequer approve the doubling of the track between Soham and Ely again to increase capacity.

Further into the future and Network Rail are looking at electrification of the line from Felixstowe to Nuneaton so electric locomotives can haul freight trains throughout. If this were to happen then the part of our line from Chippenham Junction (near Newmarket) to Cambridge would be 'in filled' so electric trains could run from Ipswich to both Cambridge and to Peterborough. These ideas / plans are still some way off coming to fruition as electrification of the lines from London to the West Country and Trans-Pennine route are the priority but they are mentioned in black and white! There will just be the issue of funding then! What we must keep an eye on is that any increase in traffic does not affect the reliability and punctuality of the passenger services.

Bad Publicity?

Do the railways really deserve the poor publicity they usually receive? If the recent signalling problems that have affected the Great Eastern main line into Liverpool Street (at the time of writing) are anything to go by, then probably! The cost of some tickets means that passengers as a minimum should get a comfortable seat on a clean train that arrives on time. However, when was the last time there was a 'good news' story on the railways?

I was thinking of my recent rail journeys now that I no longer commute to work by train. My wife and I visited our daughter in York in February and without exception from Bury all trains arrived and departed on time. I explored East Anglia on a Day Ranger ticket recently and travelled on seven separate trains all of which departed and arrived on time.

I can hear voices already shouting at me telling me that they are supposed to do that anyway and I am being naive when praising the railway for only doing its basic job. Perhaps you are right, but we 'tip' waiting staff in restaurants and taxi drivers for only 'doing their job' so why not praise the railways similarly.....or am I seeing everything now through rose tinted spectacles?

What do you think?

Rail User Group Forum

17th April 2012 – Marpa will be attending this forum which is being hosted by Greater Anglia (GA) at Liverpool Street station. GA tells us that "the meeting will provide an opportunity for us to highlight our progress over the first few weeks of the franchise and confirm plans for the rest of the franchise". They also want to cover two other key issues; "How we best engage with you and work with you".

“How we best make progress together on the longer term, strategic rail aspirations for the region, many of which depend on securing funding from third parties...”.

If you have any views or thoughts that you would like to be taken to the forum can you please let Ross Taylor know – secretary@marpa.org.uk or phone 01284 703308

MP “Committed to Rail”

Our Secretary wrote to Mr Ruffley (MP for Bury St Edmunds, Stowmarket & Needham Market) in December last when it was noted that he was not amongst the local MPs who had met with the then local rail operator and Network Rail in their quest for a better service in East Anglia. Mr Ruffley has replied explaining that he could not attend as he had a longstanding parliamentary engagement which could not be cancelled. He added that he remains totally committed to ensuring that rail services are improved in Suffolk.

He will, with colleague Dan Poulter MP, be calling a further meeting with the new operator within the next few weeks.

Bury Vision 2031

By the time you read this Marpa will have attended a focus group on 22 March arranged by St Edmundsbury Borough Council looking at the options for the borough between now and 2031.

The theme for this sub group will be Travel & Infrastructure and it is important as the area around the rail station is the cornerstone of the development of the Station Hill area.

One plan, put forward by a developer, is dependent on acquiring all of the land up to the current rail running lines which would mean the disappearance of the sidings within the current Bury Yard. This is a concern to us as we are against any railway land being sold off as once it is gone it is lost forever. We need reassurances on what contingency is planned to provide ‘siding’ capacity in the Bury area when the current thinking is to get more freight onto the rails.

Newmarket Station;

“A poor reflection of the town” - so said a reporter for the Newmarket Weekly News following Marpa’s passenger count and review of the facilities at the station in September last year.

The results of the count showed that passenger numbers had increased by almost a third from the previous count in April 2008. However, the station facilities are poor bearing in mind the importance of the town especially in horse racing terms.

Marpa is now organising a meeting at the station at the end of April to review the facilities and to see what can be done to improve them. At the time of writing we had received acceptances of our invitation to the meeting from Suffolk County Council, Forest Heath District Council and Newmarket Town Council and Greater Anglia. The local MP (Matthew Hancock) did not feel that he needed to attend a meeting at this time!

Marpa Membership

The membership of Marpa is from 1st August to 31 July each year.

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

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Don’t forget about the AGM on 19th May in Bury St Edmunds

www.marpa.org.uk