

Marpa

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

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Autumn 2018 Newsletter

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter. It has been a long hot summer which has given the railway a few problems. In particular the electrical storms that knocked out the signalling between Chippenham Junction and Cambridge on a couple of occasions. MARPA have written to Network Rail and asked for an explanation of why the signalling on this part of our route appears to be vulnerable to lightning strikes. I have heard some good feedback on GA staff who have helped passengers in times of disruption and practical help such as handing out bottled water to passengers sweltering on stranded trains.

I have heard feedback from a MARPA member that infers that MARPA committee members have a cosy relationship with rail management based on the fact we are all railway enthusiasts. This is not true! We have regular meetings with GA management and are not afraid to raise issues we are concerned about. We are enthusiastic for better public transport and especially well integrated transport that serves the community well. We have several campaigns and issues that we are supporting or trying to get resolved.

In particular MARPA :-

Supports the Needham Market disabled access campaign.

Campaigns for the Newmarket station facilities (ticket machine and cycle parking) to match the aspirations of the town.

Campaigns for better access between Bury station and town centre.

Supports the formation of a Community Rail Partnership for the route. GA are busy with a CRP for the Hertford East route at present and will write to the relevant county councils after that one is done. They are considering various ways of doing it, possibly joint with other routes. GA have a community officer who will keep us updated so MARPA can be involved.

There are not enough cycle spaces at Newmarket - 16 cycles for 11/12 spaces seen.

Car Parking Bury and Newmarket stations. At Bury Network Rail parking space increases are being finalised. Potentially an extra 20. At Newmarket it is believed that Tattersalls have refused access to their car park

Is there anything else that is bugging you about the train service? Please let us know as we do want to represent the views of our members.

Guards Dispute

I have read news reports that infer that the guards dispute is resolved. Although MARPA has remained 'neutral' in the dispute (industrial relations are not in our remit) the resolution of the dispute is clearly great news for passengers on our line.

AGM

The MARPA AGM was held in April and we had an excellent talk by Paul Webster about community rail partnerships. It is a published aspiration of Greater Anglia to form a community rail partnership (CRP) on the line of route that MARPA covers. However, enthusiasm for the CRP hasn't been overwhelming so MARPA have started asking questions to ensure that this is not relegated to the back burner by Greater Anglia and the local councils, who are both required to be 'on board' in order to form the CRP.

Paul's talk outlined the history of ACoRP, its key strategic role as the national body representing and supporting local Community Rail Partnerships and the wide range of local initiatives ACoRP has overseen all designed to foster engagement between communities and the rail services from which they benefit. He pointed out that since the first CRP was set up in 1994 (the Penistone line in Yorkshire) there had been a huge expansion right across the passenger network. ACoRP currently represents over 80 community rail lines across the UK, in addition to more than 1000 station adoption groups. Some key points:

- The key feature of a CRP was its autonomy from the train operator – even though the operator funded the community rail officer who would act to facilitate engagement and the smooth interaction of the various relevant organisations, the CRP was essentially a community driven not for profit concern serving primarily the interests of passengers and local communities.
- Practical benefit of a flourishing CRP for the train operators – data from research undertaken in 2015 indicates that lines where CRPs are in place can show a growth in passenger numbers nearly 3% greater than on lines where no CRP is in existence.
- Examples of where the existence of the CRP benefits the communities along a given line - through supporting local businesses to set up cafes in redundant station buildings (e.g. Beccles, Wickham Market, Melton); encouraging the green-fingered to adopt stations and enhance the immediate environment through gardening schemes (e.g. Bures); working with schools and colleges on art projects to help enliven station infrastructure (e.g. the vibrant murals in the subway at Manningtree); working with the train operator to promote off-peak travel for identified segments of the market (e.g. "bucket & spade" services for families Colchester-Walton).
- The presentation made it very apparent that CRPs afforded a very wide range of volunteering opportunities, both to established groups and organisations (gardening clubs, man sheds, schools etc) as well as to ad hoc groups set up as a consequence of the CRP. The scope for involvement was only limited by the energies and imaginations of those participating.
- Linked to this was the high-level policy view from the DfT that one of the key drivers for each CRP should be the achievement of tangible social goals, with a particular stress on social inclusion; there was an opportunity to use the resource provided by the CRP to involve under-represented groups in using the railway, both for travel and as a local community resource.
- Regarding the funding required to set up and maintain a CRP, Paul pointed out that whereas in the early days of CRP development the onus had been on the relevant local authorities, the balance had now shifted so that DfT money, provided via funding to the train operating companies, constituted the bulk of the necessary capital.

The most pressing question posed by the presentation for the AGM audience was just when Greater Anglia as train operator would get around to instigating moves towards a CRP on the Mid Anglia line. The strong feeling of the meeting in discussion following Paul's presentation was that Marpa should re-engage with the operator to signal our enthusiasm for the

development. Some of the “grass roots” elements of a functioning CRP were already operating on the line – a number of stations for instance already benefited from the work of station adopters, and Marpa itself (through the efforts of member R. Wolfe) had already published a set of 15 walks that exploited various stations on the route as start/finish points. The line is one of three remaining non-CRP linked services operated by GA, and given its large and growing passenger footfall it is right that the operator makes clearer its own timescale for bringing together interested parties.

There followed a Q & A session that was focussed on implementation issues for a local CRP, but there was also discussion of the role a CRP might play in supporting the train operator in its dementia strategy to ensure that station audits etc properly took account of the need of dementia sufferers alongside the more visible needs of other disabled groups. In the same vein the issue of the readability of signage for travellers suffering e.g. from cataracts was raised. The poor state of access to Thurston station, especially at night, was also highlighted, and it was identified as one of the many very practical facets of the rail infrastructure where a vigorous CRP could probably get results.

New Trains

I am getting quite excited about the new Greater Anglia trains for our route. They are looking good – even stylish which for a modern train is quite something! I reproduce below (with permission) Greater Anglia’s news release. If the new trains deliver the promised benefits they will be a generational step change in journey quality. Local trains have always suffered from the ‘not as important as mainline’ mindset since the nineteenth century and old ‘cascaded’ stock was the norm before the diesel multiple unit, which has always felt close to bus travel with levels of noise and vibration that would be unacceptable in cars – and it is effectively the private vehicle that is the competition for rail, not other forms of public transport. I digress to add that I recently travelled between Shetland and mainland Scotland on a SAAB turboprop aircraft and I was amazed at the noise and vibration level, even a sprinter was a luxury after that.

The picture shows one of Greater Anglia’s brand-new trains being put through its paces at a rail test track in the Czech Republic.

Swiss manufacturer Stadler is building 58 new trains for Greater Anglia. Before they go into passenger service they have to go through a set of rigorous tests to make sure they are fully operational, working well and meeting all safety standards.

At the Velim test centre, technicians are checking the performance and operation of the train’s voltage levels, brakes, traction system and pantographs. They are also measuring noise levels and electro-magnetic emissions.

Stadler is making 38 bi-mode trains, which can run using diesel or electricity power, and 20 electric trains for Greater Anglia. Both types of train are being testing at Velim.

The bi-mode trains will run on regional routes in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex, while the electric trains will replace the current Intercity and Stansted Express trains

The testing phase for the Greater Anglia trains started in May, in Erlen, in Switzerland and is currently being conducted at various sites in Europe. Locations include Faurei in Romania and Halle in Germany.

Each site has its own area of specialism. Carrying out testing simultaneously at several places means that production can be undertaken as efficiently as possible.

Once the trains are in the UK, people will see the trains around East Anglia for many months before they enter passenger service, as they go through a commissioning “running-in” phase.

Employees, including drivers, conductors, catering, maintenance and station staff, will also need training on the relevant aspects of the new trains that enable them to fulfil their roles. The first train is expected to enter passenger service in the middle of next year. Greater Anglia is replacing every one of its existing trains with brand-new trains. They will all have more seats, air conditioning, USB/plug points, fast free wifi, accessible toilets and better customer information screens.

Jamie Burles, Managing Director of Greater Anglia, added: “It’s really exciting to be able to see the first of our Stadler trains in action. We’re sure that these trains will transform train travel in East Anglia.

“With more seats, and all the facilities you expect on a modern train, they are definitely going to make travelling by rail a very attractive option across our region.”

Martino Celeghini, Project Manager for Stadler, said: “Each of the 58 trains we are supplying are from the latest generation of our best-selling, highly successful FLIRT family. The FLIRT is Stadler’s flagship product, featuring low floor and level boarding for improved accessibility, passenger comfort and safety. The testing phase signifies a critical landmark in the process of making and finishing the trains, and it’s only by effective collaboration with our client that the project has been able to make such good progress.”

The Velim Test Centre, owned by the Railway Research Institute, has two test tracks, and is one of the main testing locations for new types of trains due to be used across Europe. Greater Anglia is getting a further 111 new trains from Bombardier, based in Derby.



(photo © Greater Anglia)

New Timetable

MARPA will be consulted, along with other rail user groups on a new timetable to be introduced with the trains. The words 'new timetable' will concern passengers after the 'service meltdown' surrounding the introduction of a new timetable in the North West and Thameslink areas. My opinion is that lessons will be swiftly learned and I'm sure that Greater Anglia will be at pains to avoid a similar debacle.

For those travelling via Cambridge I'm informed that GN timetable is 'settling down' and getting better.

New Ticket Machines

Several station along the line have had concrete patches appearing. These are the first sign of new ticket machines. This a welcome 'modernisation' of station facilities and MARPA sincerely hopes that the new machines will be a different design to the troublesome Newmarket machine. The photograph below was taken by MARPA committee member Ben Walsh at Dullingham back in August.



MARPA Membership

The membership of MARPA is from 1st January to 31st December each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year 2018 please do so now! 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.

Annual Membership Subscription Rates:

Adult - £5.00

Family/Joint - £6.00

Concession - £4.00

(Student / Senior / Unwaged / Disabled)

Please renew your 2018 subscription by getting in touch with our Membership Secretary (Peter Rutt 01359 242464). His address is:-

MARPA (Membership)

c/o Well House, The Street, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, IP30 9BS

Please make your cheque payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association'.

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