

# Marpa

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association  
[www.marpa.org.uk](http://www.marpa.org.uk)

Published by MARPA  
Edited by Peter Rutt  
[peterrutt06@aol.com](mailto:peterrutt06@aol.com)

## Autumn 2019 Newsletter

Dear MARPA member.

We had an excellent AGM this year, despite the clash with 'Music Day' meaning we had a heavy rock soundtrack to the main speaker's talk (next year's AGM will be booked to avoid the clash....)

### AGM

The AGM was well attended and full minutes have been prepared. Regrettably engineering works prevented some members attending and Network Rail's speaker unfortunately had to cancel. To give you all the 'edited highlights' they were: -

**Network Rail plans** (from information forwarded by the NR representative after he cancelled)

Spending plans on major infrastructure are now confirmed for the period to 2024. Just over £2 billion is available for projects in East Anglia, split between routine maintenance and renewal across the network. Significant renewal work is also scheduled at Liverpool Street station. It is likely that track renewal work on the mid-Anglia route will be focused on Stowmarket, where under the Access for All scheme funding is also committed for building lifts making access for all users easier between the platforms. The scheme at Stowmarket is one of only two successful Access for All bids on the GA network.

Three key projects directly relevant to Marpa and the passenger groups it serves were also highlighted – track doubling at Haughley Junction; Ely area track and signalling improvements; re-building a station at Soham, between Ely and Bury St Edmunds.

Unfortunately, although each project has attracted significant support from a variety of key partners, both within and outside the rail industry itself, no precise funding commitments have yet been made. Whilst it is possible that work on one or more of them could yet begin within the current control period – particularly at Soham, where significant funding is to be provided by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority – these projects are not costed and confirmed

The most significant driver for investment in rail in the region is the continued growth of Cambridge. Passenger numbers at Cambridge and the recently opened Cambridge North stations are now annually approaching over 12 million, making it the second busiest hub after Liverpool Street. To address growing demand, the Cambridge Corridor Study has identified the need for additional platforms at the station as well as doubling track on the Coldhams Lane – Newmarket section as part of ensuring readiness for the arrival of East West Rail. The issue of doubling from Newmarket – very pertinent to Marpa members – is bound up with several factors, including best estimates of traffic growth arising from further development westwards from Cambridge along the "corridor"

(including Newmarket & Bury St Edmunds) and the position to be taken by the East West Rail Co. regarding its eastern section operations from Ipswich and Norwich. The assumption is that a robust case from them for infrastructure enhancements such as Newmarket section doubling and Haughley Junction improvements, that would enable passenger services from Ipswich to reach Bedford and points west via Cambridge, would in all likelihood meet a sympathetic response from government. Equally, the impression given is that none of this is likely to happen within the next five years.

Points arising from questions and answers on this section of the presentation included:

- Concern expressed at the timescales being considered in NR's planning – e.g. track doubling around Newmarket by 2043. NR's budget from the Department for Transport is tightly controlled and cannot hope to satisfy all expectations within a given budgetary period. However, as circumstances change so strategic priorities can be adjusted – housing and related economic growth in the region could well lead to re-consideration of some of the timescales. In the first instance this is a challenge to be addressed by local and national government
- It was acknowledged that digital signalling could overcome some of the current logistic constraints in terms of train frequency. However, this represents a significant resource investment and is unlikely to occur on mid-Anglia lines in the near future.

### **Greater Anglia plans**

Alan Neville (AN) provided a detailed and upbeat outline of the progress GA is making in its franchise, scheduled to run to 2025. In terms of the new rolling stock, he underlined the point that with the fleet fully operational from late 2020 passengers would be using trains fully air conditioned, single class, with wi-fi throughout, much improved accessibility (tested through liaison with relevant groups) and with a guaranteed minimum of three cars, thus easing capacity concerns. A number of the bi-mode trains which will operate all regional services in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire are already on trial in the region, and the first of the bigger 12 car intercity/Stansted Express trains has also arrived for testing and crew training.

Regarding Community Rail Partnerships, he acknowledged that the development of such a partnership for the mid-Anglia line, an initiative strongly supported both by Marpa and by Railfuture East Anglia, remained work in progress. He accepted that the mid-Anglia route is now in a small minority on the GA network not to benefit from the work of a dedicated CRP and aimed to get an update on discussions between GA and the relevant local authorities (Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) which he would share with Marpa in due course. He recognised the readiness of Marpa and its members to assist in helping bring a mid-Anglia CRP into existence. On a more positive note, AN highlighted the impact of station adopters in helping to enhance the environment of stations and the facilities on offer. Each adopter had an annual budget of £200 to spend per station. New adopters had recently started work at Stowmarket and Newmarket. Already 95 stations on the network had an adopter in place.

Points arising from questions and answers on this section of the presentation included:

- The readability of some of the screens on the new ticketing machines and information boards was raised (Sudbury, Kennett). AN would investigate.
- He confirmed that on the new train fleet serving the mid-Anglia route there would be space for up to six cycles.
- In terms of the new timetable – whenever it eventually appeared – a plea was made for later last trains in both directions between Cambridge and Ipswich.

A plea was made for additional services to address increased demand associated with specific sporting or cultural events. The Guineas meeting at Newmarket race course was cited. AN mentioned the existing precedent, increased services from Cambridge to Duxford (for the air

museum) and recognised the scope for such additionality. He informed the meeting that ongoing meetings with the racing industry were taking place



Why train travel to the MARPA AGM was disrupted. Network Rail's half mile long High Output Ballast Cleaner was working at Elmswell

## Freight trains

At the AGM in April there was a lively debate about the role of freight on our line in which it was clear that several members thought that growing freight volumes would decrease passenger train reliability and cause delays. Broadly speaking this is far from the case, although I write this a few days after a freight train failure near Thurston seemed to have caused a few hours of chaos so it does happen.

The freight on our line of route is mainly, although not exclusively, container traffic for the port at Felixstowe. If there was no port, freight would be reduced to the stone/aggregate trains to the terminals at Kennett and Barham, which average less than 1 per day. Therefore, the container traffic to and from Felixstowe is very important, not only to the economy of the country but to the micro-economics of our line. The Felixstowe branch has a capacity of 34 trains per day and works being carried out this year will increase that figure to 45 of which 22 will go via London but the balance of 23 will come across the Marpa route.

What this freight usage does to the portion of our line that uses it (Ipswich – Chippenham Junction near Newmarket) is to ensure the track and signalling is maintained to a high standard to take frequent 1,000 tonne plus trains, and that is no bad thing. The track access charges from the freight companies pays a big part of the cost of maintenance on our route and ensures the line is not regarded as a 'rural backwater'. There will be issues and conflicts but it is great to see the railway growing and the more lorries off the A14 the better. It is well worth remembering that one freight train can take up to 80 HGV's off the roads with consequential savings in polluting emissions.

Inevitably freight growth restricts the ability to timetable new passenger services. I think (and this is my personal view) that this means that there is no prospect of a half hourly Ipswich – Cambridge service on our route. Should the Peterborough – Ipswich service become an hourly service then the Bury – Stowmarket – Ipswich core of the Marpa route would have a de-facto half hourly service. We need Network Rail to prioritise the reinstatement of Haughley Junction

as a 'double track' junction – the single lead junction it is now is a pinch point of capacity on this line of route. In conclusion I think Marpa members need to understand that freight is important to our line, it is nationally important and growing but we all receive benefits from a lower carbon method of moving goods, less road congestion. The downsides might be the odd delay and disruption but it is a vital part of our railway.



Freight trains to and from Yorkshire pass at Elmswell in April, potentially 160 HGVs worth of freight here.

### **NENTA 'Days out by train'**

My wife and I enjoyed a 'day' trip from Stowmarket to Carlisle and back in September. The train left at 05.40 and we returned into Stowmarket at around 00.30 so it was a seriously long day out. It was hugely enjoyable with great views of the Settle – Carlisle line and the Cumbrian coast route (until it got dark!). It is good to know that it is still possible to get on an 'excursion' train at Stowmarket and Bury St Edmunds in this day and age. We had 3 hours in Carlisle to stretch our legs prior to the return trip. It wasn't too expensive on a cost per mile basis, but then again it was a trip of well over 600 miles!

### **New Trains**

On Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September a class 755 train carried out gauging tests along our route. Then in October the trains have commenced driver/crew training. We may feel 'forgotten' as the new trains are put into service on the Wherry lines and Cambridge – Norwich route but the signs are there, they are coming. Marpa hope that we don't get all the 3-car class 170 units removed from our line and have to make do with shorter 2 car 156s or even the single car class 153, that won't help passenger perception – we want to grow the line not see potential passengers leaving. I see in the Bury local paper that a student is 'taking on' Greater Anglia over the short trains between Bury and Cambridge. We need to be patient, but please Greater Anglia don't take us back to the trains of the 1980s before we get the new ones. Marpa are currently

actively raising this issue with Greater Anglia to ensure that the passenger's viewpoint is heard by GA management.

On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October I went to see the first daytime run of the new train on driver training. It was impressively quiet from outside, good for those living along the line of route, and I expect the lack of underfloor engines will make it pleasant to ride in too.



The first new train in daylight approaching Elmswell 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019

### **Station facilities**

Elmswell has a passenger information screen on both platform – at long last!

### **Improvements to Bury St Edmunds Station – Information taken from the Greater Anglia publicity**

Greater Anglia is preparing to improve car parking at Bury St Edmunds rail station, with the number of spaces set to triple. Representatives of the train operator and Network Rail met with Jo Churchill MP, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, Bury Town Council, Bury Town Trust and “Our Bury St Edmunds” on 14 August to present the plans and answer questions.

The current car park at the station has 23 spaces plus two disabled bays. The work planned by Greater Anglia will increase capacity to 74, with associated work to improve the important transport hub in terms of improved facilities and interchange. The old station master's house will also receive attention, thanks to a £192K grant to train operator, Greater Anglia, from the Railway Heritage Trust. The money will be used to reinstate the roof, doors and windows of the Grade II listed building, which is adjacent to the main rail station.

### **UPDATE ON NEEDHAM MARKET ACCESS FOR ALL CAMPAIGN**

Since the Spring 2019 Newsletter the campaign has had the disappointing news that the Access for All bid submitted by Greater Anglia was unsuccessful – readers are probably aware that the only successful bid for access improvement funding in East Anglia was awarded to

Stowmarket. On a more positive note, we can report that the up platform at Needham now benefits from a help point.

Currently the campaign is working with Greater Anglia and the local authorities on a bid to a smaller government fund, the Mid-Tier Programme. The overall vision is for a ramp to the up platform, enabling pedestrians (including the mobility restricted) to have easy access either to the platform or to Needham Lake via an enhanced access route under the station that makes use of the existing subway. The Needham Lake site is soon to benefit from £600K of investment in a new visitor centre, so a scheme to improve station access will also have the effect of making it easier for people to access the Lake safely on foot or by bike from the town. Watch this space for further developments!

### **MARPA Membership**

The membership of MARPA is from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year 2019 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'.

### **WEB SITE REMINDER**

Please visit/use our website [www.marpa.org.uk](http://www.marpa.org.uk)