

Marpa

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

Published by MARPA
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Spring 2021 Newsletter

Dear MARPA member.

I have been holding off sending a newsletter for a couple of months as I was hoping to give you all news of the MARPA bank account with information for online payments. We (Chairman/secretary and myself as Treasurer) have filled in forms, given all sorts of information to prove we are not money laundering, been to see banks, juggled odd combinations of hard and electronic copies yet I still don't have an account to announce here. If you wish to send a cheque to renew please do so, but the old account is effectively suspended and the new one not yet open so your cheque will sit with me until I can pay it in.

In this Newsletter I comment that we are a 'forward facing' organisation whilst interested in our history. As part of 'forward facing' it is worth mentioning that RAIL EAST provides a quarterly catch up on key developments across the region & can be read at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/>

AGM

It would be good to hold an 'in person' AGM this year and it may be in the Autumn. Notice will be given and hopefully we can find someone willing to talk to us. However, there are so many caveats on doing anything at the moment that making plans is rather difficult.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR SO FAR

Since my report in July last year the virus situation has varied between hope and despair making it difficult to look to the future and arrange meetings and other events. We managed to hold a committee meeting in September but at other times we have used email to discuss problems and other matters. However, using email is not the same as a meeting when ideas can be discussed and prompt discussion on other problems.

If the easing of restrictions goes according to plan we hope to hold a committee meeting in July. One topic will be arranging the 2021 AGM. We had to cancel last year's AGM and this year it will be late – hopefully sometime in the Autumn.

In spite of these problems, we have not been idle. Greater Anglia has been pressed for information on progress on improvements to Needham Market and Bury St Edmunds stations after obtaining Access for All Funding early in 2020. I understand from the Needham campaign group that GA hopes to appoint a consultant to undertake a feasibility study in the very near future. Meanwhile the drawn out tale of access improvement at Stowmarket continues. You may recall that funding such a scheme was a condition of approval for the Snoasis winter sports project at Great Blakenham. A modified version of that project under a new name - Valley Ridge - has now been put forward and is currently open to public consultation. It is not yet clear whether the same conditions will apply to the revised project - should it go ahead.

We have submitted our comments to three consultations:

October 2020 (Network Rail) Ely Area Capacity Enhancement – this is a scheme to allow more trains to pass through Ely. We thought their proposals were not ambitious enough and did not make sufficient provision for future growth. Further consultations on this scheme are expected. January 2021 (Greater Anglia) December 2021 timetable. No detail of actual times was given, just a summary of service levels. We were disappointed with the proposals which appear to be the same as the present service and do not include the improvements promised when the franchise started.

March 2021 (Network Rail) Cambridge area resignalling. This includes the Marpa route between Cambridge and Thurston and involves the closure of Dullingham, Chippenham Junction and Bury St Edmunds signal boxes. This scheme is largely welcomed apart from detailed technical concerns.

Please let us know if you would like a copy of our submission to any of these consultations.

After a period of site clearance the construction of Soham station has now commenced. This involves bus substitution of services between Bury St Edmunds and Ely on some weekends.

John Drake
5 April 2021

175 YEARS OF THE IPSWICH – BURY St EDMUNDS LINE

MARPA looks to the future, we are after all affiliated to Railfuture and such history often doesn't feature. However, I was reading an article on an unrelated subject in a local history magazine when I noticed that the date that Bury to Ipswich railway line opened was 26th November 1846. That will be 175 years ago come the autumn and I was musing how the 100th and 150th anniversaries were marked. Marking significant anniversaries is something Railway Companies used to do well. Did anything happen in 1996? Where you there and do you have any photographs or memories to share?

The railway was built by a company called the Ipswich and Bury Railway, which was a subsidiary of the Eastern Union Railway, which had built a line up from Colchester into Ipswich. The Ipswich & Bury Railway was granted parliamentary approval on the 21st July 1845 and opened just over a year later in November 1846. By any reckoning that was tremendous progress, what can you build in a year and bit nowadays? I do need to convince myself that the parliamentary approval meant the first 'shovels in the ground', but whatever the process was it was quick and don't forget that railway mania was in full swing so men and resources presumably at a premium.

I expect we have amongst the MARPA members someone with a full history – if you would like to do an article for the autumn newsletter please let me know.

MID ANGLIA ROUTE STATION USAGE ESTIMATES 2015 – 2020

(As published by Office of Rail & Road January 2021)
YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH

Station	2015	2019	2020	% change 2020 to:	
				2015	2019
Needham Market	92,418	102,320	100,754	9.0	-1.5
Stowmarket	932,510	967,114	916,094	-1.8	-5.3
Elmswell	74,284	71,078	71,050	-4.4	0
Thurston	69,856	77,592	71,562	2.4	-7.8
Bury St. Edmunds	596,638	665,112	657,942	10.5	-1.1
Kennett	31,896	42,684	42,516	33.3	-0.4
Newmarket	289,734	355,068	335,652	15.8	-5.5
Dullingham	39,528	41,832	35,086	-11.2	-16.1
ALL EAST ANGLIA				11.6	-4.3

The ORR data published in January 2021 reflects travel volumes during the year 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 on the Mid Anglia (Cambridge – Ipswich) service. The data for Stowmarket and Bury St Edmunds includes travel on other services which the ORR dataset doesn't disaggregate. The full dataset plus methodology is here:

<http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/station-usage-estimates>

Over the five years 2015 – 2020, allowing for occasional annual falls at some stations, the overall trend in terms of passenger numbers on the Mid Anglia line has been upwards. The entry of Needham Market in 2018 to the “six figure club” has been sustained since, but the principal feature emerging from the year-on-year figures is the significant drop in numbers for the most recent year. Given that the data ends just as COVID lockdown restrictions began, it is concerning that even pre-pandemic numbers were showing a decline in usage at nearly all stations on the route. So increased passenger numbers at stations such as Thurston, Dullingham and Kennet reported previously have suffered a reversal in the year to March 2020. The fall in numbers at Dullingham is especially marked. It is hard not to attribute at least some of the decline across the route to the unfortunate sequence of cancellations and delays at the end of 2019 and the start of 2020 caused by technical problems in the new Stadler bi-mode train fleet. Whilst they have been fully resolved, it is deeply unfortunate that the subsequent lockdown has further aggravated the fall in passenger numbers, with the government dictating insisting on “essential travel” only since March 2020.

As COVID restrictions continue to ease, it will be interesting to see what if any strategies Greater Anglia employs to encourage a return to rail. In COVID briefings issued regularly to stakeholders since the start of the pandemic, the company has been at pains to stress the hygiene measures it has employed to maximise the safety of travellers and staff on the railway. It may take more than such reassurances to tempt people back for both leisure and work, so we await with interest any initiatives GA devises, along with its partner train operators, to encourage rail travel again once circumstances permit.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

If you have sent me a cheque to renew your membership this year it is likely to still be in my files pending a trip to Stowmarket which coincides with opening times at the bank. I've been a few times and find that the opening times seem to be 'flexible', so please don't think that I've lost your cheque.

MARPA Membership

The membership of MARPA is from 1st January to 31st December each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year 2021 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. **WHEN WE GET A BANK ACCOUNT THAT ACCEPTS ONLINE PAYMENTS WE WILL LET YOU KNOW!**

Annual Membership Subscription Rates:

Adult - £5.00

Family/Joint - £6.00

Concession - £4.00

(Student / Senior / Unwaged / Disabled)

Please renew your 2021 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

The snowy landscape of Elmswell in early February with a Cambridge train passing. The livery works very well as camouflage in the snow.

