

Marpa

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

Published by MARPA
Edited by Peter Rutt
peterrutt06@aol.com

Late Summer/Autumn 2022 Newsletter

Dear MARPA member.

Welcome to the late summer newsletter, although it feels quite autumnal as the leaves are falling and I've seen that the 'leaf busting' trains to deal with the annual leaves on the line issue are now in Stowmarket for the season. The summer has seen a few issues with our line, a MARPA meeting was disrupted by a signalling failure (see article below), we have also suffered from a few freight locomotive failures. We hope that no such issues will affect our AGM (but please check for planned engineering works beforehand!) The MARPA committee look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the AGM.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

The MARPA AGM takes place at 2.15pm in the Friends Meeting House in St Johns Street Bury St Edmunds on **Saturday 15th October**. Please do come and meet other people with an interest in our line.

There will be presentations from Alan Neville of Greater Anglia and Charles Baker from Network Rail, with opportunity for questions and discussion.

Do come along, all are welcome and it is good to put faces to names and to meet new people. There is usually an attendance of over 20 and FREE refreshments are available.



PROBLEMS FOUND BY RAIL PASSENGERS

Concern has been felt by a number of local rail users at what feels to many like a decline in the overall quality of the passenger experience on services through Bury St Edmunds. This is not to deny the benefits introduced by the new station entrance from Fornham Road, nor the high quality and reliability of the rolling stock now used on local services.

The recent closure of the ticket office at Bury St Edmunds is of particular concern. Ticket machines are available but they can be confusing to passengers not used to them, especially if too many ticket options are provided. Not all tickets are available from the machines (e.g. Anglia Plus). A member of staff should be on hand to help and sell tickets but may be busy - and there are times when staff absence means the station is unstaffed. Tickets can be purchased from the train conductor but that may not be possible before passengers reach their destination. As a simple practical point, if a form has to be completed (e.g. to buy a railcard) there are no flat surfaces to do this in the entrance to Bury station. Not everyone can buy tickets online, just as not everyone uses a smartphone, which makes closure of ticket offices a retrograde step.

Linked to the point above about staff absence, early closure of the toilets and waiting room at Bury St Edmunds can also be a problem.

Frequent problems on the line between Newmarket and Cambridge may also be discouraging passengers. A case in point is the serious disruption experienced on 11th August, when trains were cancelled or seriously delayed. Hopefully this longstanding issue will be resolved when re-signalling is complete (– see *the next item.*)

Feedback to MARPA suggests that ticket gates are disliked, more staff and better facilities are preferred. Equally, there is a strong desire for more trains on the Peterborough route - hourly rather than the current two hour pattern - with some stopping at intermediate stations serving growing populations, such as Elmswell and Thurston. There is also a robust case for introducing an hourly service at Kennett on services to and from Cambridge.

Local rail services operated by Greater Anglia have seen significant improvements in recent years. But there is clearly room for further improvement, and the closure of the Bury St Edmunds ticket office looks like a step backwards.

Signalling – Current Problems and Hopefully Future Solutions.

The recent MARPA committee meeting was disrupted by signalling failures, some members could not make the meeting and had to abort their journeys. The MARPA committee has been aware that a number of signalling problems that have arisen over the past year or so. We contacted Network Rail for a comment and explanation and have received the following basic information

- There has been a total of 29 incidents over the past 12 months
- Of these, 13 were signal failures
- Six were track circuit failures
- Six were points failures
- Four were panel failures
- One incident was a block failure

It is many years since I worked for the railway and I cannot quite interpret these figures to the level of detail I'd want, and indeed there is no trend information here (and to be fair it wasn't requested) . It does 'feel' that the number of failures is growing, and that would be commensurate with an aging signalling system. Quite what constitutes a 'signal failure' is not clear. Usually this is railway speak for a track circuit failure, which in my experience was the weak link in the system as the electrical continuity bonds between rails get damaged or affected

by adverse weather. There are only 6 specific track circuit failures in 12 months which doesn't seem unreasonable. What we are not told is if any of the failures are repeated in any one piece of equipment of area, nor (because I believe that this information is commercially sensitive) the delay minutes attributed to the failures. However, overall, we have 29 signalling incidents in 12 months, that is approximately 2 and half failures per month or every other week. This affects journey reliability, which is what passengers want. I recall from my company car days of travelling the A14 that a delay of over 5 minutes was quite unusual and that I was on time at my place of work 95-100% of the time. Go down to 90% journey reliability or under and I think people would reassess their choice of transport (and yes, I do know it is not as simple as this in reality!) but then the community starts to think 'you can't rely on the railway' and it gets harder to promote greener travel.

When asked what is being done about this, Network Rail point to their £194 million investment in the Cambridge re-signalling, re-lock and re-control project (C3R). This substantial investment aims 'to deliver state-of-the-art signalling technology for the railway which means better reliability and reduced maintenance, while providing a platform ready for digital technologies such as the European Train Control System (ETCS).'

Network Rail's plans include:-

- An upgrade of the signalling control equipment at Cambridge power signal box
- The upgrade of the signalling safety interlocking equipment with a modern signalling technology
- The closure of three signal boxes and relocating control of the signalling to Cambridge power signal box
- Upgrade of seven level crossings from half barrier to full barriers to improve safety for all crossing users
- Renewal of the telecommunications and power supplies to support the new systems
- Decommissioning of three mechanical signal boxes and relocating control of signalling to the Cambridge power signal box

Upon completion the project will have replaced almost 700 signalling assets across the area.

Further information is available at [Cambridge re-signalling - Network Rail](#)

The three mechanical signalling boxes to be decommissioned are on the MARPA line of route, namely Dullingham, Chippenham Junction and Bury St Edmunds. Therefore, the investment and re-signalling of our route is major, we are not an afterthought here. Whilst we might have some disruption (weekend closures etc.), and no doubt a few 'bedding down' issues, the overall outlook is bright. The main caveat is timescale.

Revolutionary footbridge design for Stowmarket (Copied with permission from an article first published in 'Rail East' by Jerry Alderson)

Stowmarket will be one of the first stations in Britain to have a modular Ava footbridge installed. It will replace the old concrete pedestrian footbridge thanks to an award from the DfT's 'Access for All' scheme, which was announced in 2019. It will be constructed in September or October 2023, over a single weekend, meaning minimal disruption for passengers. It comes with a 'plug and play' lift, so called because it is separate to the stability system of the main bridge.

The current way of providing a new station footbridge can be quite inefficient, with it being produced in one place, transported elsewhere to be painted then transported to the site as a full-size bridge, with the road transportation being difficult to manage. Instead, the Ava bridge is designed to be assembled in 1.2m long modules using structural elements cut from flat sheets of stainless steel and bolted together. It costs less than a traditional footbridge and requires less

maintenance. This means that more stations could have accessible footbridges and sooner than would have been the case, which can only be a good thing. With a modular bridge, less land is needed to store the components at the station, where it will be fitted out with cladding, canopy, lighting and other mechanical and electrical services before being erected as close to finished as possible.



The image of the footbridge below is very different to the one for Stowmarket. It is from Rail Business Daily and may not necessarily reflect what will be installed.



It's obviously great news that Stowmarket is to benefit from the new bridge design outlined in Jerry Alderson's article, but does the design also offer hope for rail users at Needham Market, where campaigners continue to press for better access to & from the Ipswich platform? The campaign, supported by Marpa, has still to hear from Greater Anglia about estimated costings for a bridge/lift solution; it would be good if the new design makes that solution more affordable.

MARPA Membership

The membership of MARPA is from 1st January to 31st December each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year **2022** 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.

Our bank account will allow direct payment of subscriptions via BACS. In order to pay direct into our account please use

Sort Code 52-30-31. Our bank is Nat West

Account number 49892002

PLEASE, PLEASE give your name and add 'SUBS' when you make any online payment, that will really help me keep a grip on operating an internet-based account! I can still take cheques if you prefer. Please make your cheque payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association' and post to me at the address below.

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

WEB SITE REMINDER

Please visit/use our website www.marpa.org.uk

