

Marpa

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

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Spring 2023 Newsletter

Dear MARPA member.

A frequent complaint that is received by the MARPA team are the high fares that seem to be charged for short notice journeys. I recently had occasion to visit New Cross in South London between 12.30 and 15.00. To my surprise I found that an off-peak return from Elmswell was £18.20 using my Senior Railcard. I am a mere 63 year old so was surprised to discover that I qualify for a senior railcard 5 years before I become a 'pensioner'. The journey was via Cambridge and required a change at London Bridge, so 'longer' time wise than travelling via Ipswich and Liverpool Street but less hassle. I do have to say that the Cambridge – Brighton Thameslink core service does open up journey opportunities that many people still do not know exist. The positives, apart from the bargain fare were no changing to the underground and a chance to look around the wonderfully remodelled London Bridge. A station that feels very impressive now as an interchange, and good time keeping from all the services used, as some changes were quite tight. The downside remains the super hard seats/cold ambience in the Thameslink trains, but if you are doing 100mph on the East Coast Main Line they cover ground swiftly. I am still slightly surprised that no effort is made to put a trolley refreshment service on the long-distance trains, I did not have time to get a coffee at Cambridge (the loss of the AMT expresso booth is good news for the other coffee provider looking at the length of queue). On my return journey disruption at Dartford in Kent meant my booked train on 'The Trainline App' was delayed and would miss the Thameslink connection north, it did not bother me as there were alternatives to jump on, yet before I had arrived back in Elmswell I received an email inviting me to claim compensation for my delayed journey. Morally, I felt I could not claim as the journey had been very smooth!

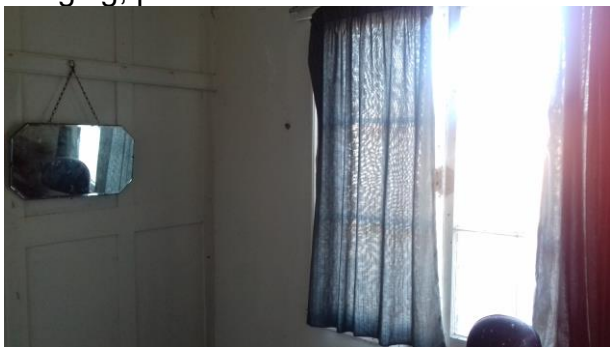
Overall, I had an enjoyable day out for a reasonable price. I think with a bit of planning I might have been able to find a 'Hare Fare' offer from GA but having commuted via Ipswich for many years the Cambridge route is different scenery.

Thurston Station Building Visit

There is local campaign in Thurston to bring the dilapidated station building back into everyday usage. The station is owned by Network Rail but managed by Greater Anglia under the franchise agreement. The building was last used by a printing business but has not been used for many years. The rooms are basically sound and watertight but require extensive refurbishment before they can be used again. MARPA were invited to attend a walk around the buildings under supervision. Ben Walsh and several MARPA committee members attended and Ben send this view of the morning.



'We were accompanied on our visit by Elizabeth McGregor, who is from Community Action for Thurston Station – 'C.A.T.S.' Elizabeth was extremely pleased to have MARPA support for this venture, and we were guided round by a very helpful representative from Greater Anglia Assets Team. The station looked wonderful - it still had a mirror in it, and an old piece of curtain still hanging, photos.



It would be so nice to see it back in Community hands again, and I think that, Greater Anglia, would welcome that too, because they realise the potential historical importance, of having such a building repurposed. If this could come to fruition, then I think everyone would benefit'



Later Train Services from Cambridge to Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

There has been a long-standing call for later evening services from Cambridge towards Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, especially from Newmarket town councillors.

We understand the difficulties in providing additional resources for such a service but owing to the urgent need to decarbonise and aid the local economies we propose that Greater Anglia consider that there could be an adjustment to current services on Friday and Saturdays.

Cambridge is a major regional centre for the night-time economy. Cambridge has a very large regional catchment bounded by King's Lynn, Harlow, Stevenage and Bury St Edmunds. The railway serves it reasonably well with last services from Cambridge to King's Lynn at 00.35; to Royston, Baldock and stations to Stevenage at 23.54; to all stations Hatfield 23.27; to Bishops Stortford at 23.27. The last service all stations to Bury St Edmunds is 22.47.

The pubs and restaurants of Cambridge close sometime around 23.00. with a significant number closing around 02.00. Time is needed to get to the station. The "Last train possible" from London to Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds is also an issue.

We propose that that Greater Anglia looks to change the timings of last trains on Friday and Saturday evenings only. Currently the last train from Cambridge is:22.47 from Cambridge Which is the 22.42 arrival from Ipswich. The last train connecting from London Kings Cross departs at 21.39 arriving at 22.33 leaving a reasonable connection time, sufficient to avoid staring intently at your watch from Hitchin onwards.

If on Friday and Saturday nights the last service to Ipswich left 30 minutes later at say 23.10 then :the last train connecting from London KX would depart at 22.09 with a Cambridge arrival time of 23.03

This later departure gives both Cambridge and London users a much better departure time. Though not optimum for London users.

Alternatively, leave the 22.47 departure as it is currently. On Friday and Saturday extend the last service from Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds through to Cambridge. The Ipswich departure at 22.21. would give a Cambridge arrival 23.42 Ipswich. Last train connecting from London Kings Cross depart 22.39 could easily connect with a proposed 23.47 to Ipswich, or at least Bury St Edmunds.

This gives a much more "civilised" and useful last departure from London to stations across west and mid Suffolk and a very reasonable last train from Cambridge. We note that the return working of the short Ipswich-Bury St Edmunds service returns empty cars from Ipswich to Norwich.

If our proposal is adopted for the short Ipswich-Bury service to carry on to Cambridge and return at 23.47 it could be terminated at Stowmarket and run back to Norwich as a later Cambridge-Norwich service on Fridays and Saturdays.

We hope these ideas for improving the service across mid Suffolk will be looked at carefully. We would see them as a way the railway industry showing its users the benefits of the very expensive resignalling programme now underway.

Latest MARPA Campaigns information:-

MARPA met with Alan Neville from Greater Anglia early in the New Year to discuss a number of the issues travellers continue to raise regarding services and facilities on the Mid Anglia route. Topics raised and responses from Greater Anglia are summarised below.

Needham - news re feasibility + any progress on disabled access signage/on train announcements?

- (Yet another) feasibility study on design & costs of step free access either via subway or new footbridge is now scheduled to be undertaken **Autumn 2023**. Marpa registered concern at this protracted timeline. New station signage including help for travellers facing access challenges is to be made available at all stations served by trains with on board conductors. However the information will be generic rather than station-specific. There are no plans to introduce additional on board announcements.

** Thurston - building + crossing - progress?*

- Marpa has been invited to visit Thurston to look at the station interior. A purchase order has been finalised for exterior work, which will be undertaken soon, dependent on weather. GA would welcome thoughts on how best to market the community/business opportunities of the building. The lack of dedicated parking is acknowledged to be a potential barrier. Network Rail has the need to upgrade the existing crossing on its radar. There has been dialogue with MSDC as the responsible district council. Work now underway to finalise a feasibility study to review options for the crossing.

** May 23 Timetable changes? Possibility of a later train ex-CBG for BSE/Ipswich? Extra stops @ Kennett?*

- Later final train from Cambridge will be considered. It was acknowledged that this was a longstanding Marpa concern. Some additional stops at peaks for Kennett are under consideration for the next timetable refresh. GA very aware of MARPA's position on both. (Subsequent to the meeting Marpa was informed that GA still judged that a later train from Cambridge was not currently feasible.)

** Additional ticket machine @ Newmarket?*

- Ruled out - no salient business case.

** Soham services*

- Hourly frequency is still GA's ambition, but current position remains that NR is unable to secure additional passenger service pathways. The possibility of a higher frequency at weekends was however not ruled out. (The most recent national ORR data for passenger usage of stations clearly shows demand for a more frequent service at Soham is strong.)

The second part of the meeting involved a very informative presentation from Sarah Grove of Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton CRP, followed by discussion. Sarah outlined a number of important aspects of the CRP's activity, including the role of the partnership officer, governance model, finances, accreditation & how its work relates to the four "key pillars" established nationally by the Community Rail Network. MARPA's regular dialogue over facilities and services with GA was something Sarah identified as a strength to be built on in any emerging Mid Anglia CRP, as was the existing model of station adopters at every station on the route. Alan Neville endorsed this, and reminded us that Marpa has a critical role to play in lobbying the relevant councils in support of a CRP

MARPA Membership

The membership of MARPA runs from 1st January to 31st December each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year **2023** please do so now! Reminders have been sent by email to current members and letters will be posted shortly . . . **but** please renew, as your membership is valued by us and the subscription is vital if we are to continue to campaign in support of issues on our local rail routes that members feel strongly about.

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 name MARPA

Account number 49892002

PLEASE, PLEASE give your name and add 'SUBS' when you make any online payment, that will really help us to identify your payment on an internet-based account!

You can pay using **PayPal** by sending your payment to membership@marpa.org.uk - PayPal provide all the information needed to identify you. And the facility to renew using PayPal will be added to the website shortly.

Finally, you can still send cheques if you prefer. Please make your cheque payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association' and post to the address below.

Lloyd Butler

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Annual Membership Subscription Rates:

Adult - £5.00

Family/Joint - £6.00

Concession - £4.00

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Please renew your 2023 subscription by getting in touch with Membership Secretary Lloyd Butler. Email membership@marpa.org.uk

WEB SITE REMINDER

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



A reminder of autumnal warmth as a train climbs the gradient from Elmswell towards Thurston, passing a Felixstowe bound freight. You hardly notice this climb onboard, but the long lens exaggerates the climb.