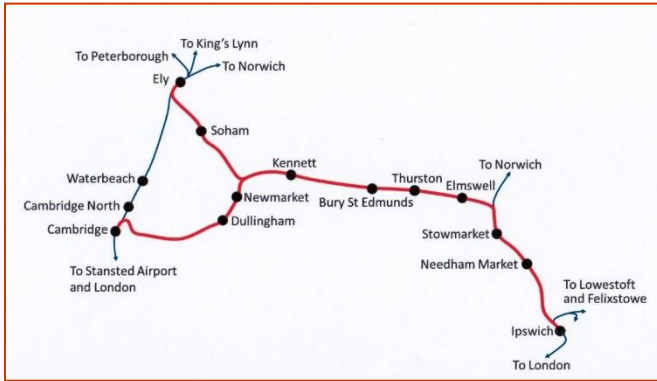


MARPA Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association



NEWSLETTER November 2024

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WELCOME

Welcome to this autumn edition of the MARPA newsletter. The great news that our line will now be covered by a Community Rail Partnership is the main item, a culmination of many years of asking and campaigning. There are several items in this newsletter giving further information so please read on and enjoy.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR



So, the really good news this period was the announcement of the Community Rail Partnership (CRP) along our Mid Anglia line. MARPA has been campaigning for this CRP

for more years now than I can remember and so it was especially pleasing, and with a sigh of relief, that we received the news on 17th October. MARPA never gave up and at every opportunity pushed and cajoled the relevant bodies to set one up. We are delighted, and now see the opportunities to work with Suffolk County Council, other Local Authorities and Greater Anglia to build

on the progress that we have seen more recently.

On 11th October, MARPA was represented at the plaque unveiling at Ely Station for our former Chair John Drake who sadly died in December 2023. It was a simple ceremony with many of John's family present and also Alan Neville from Greater Anglia (GA). We are grateful to Alan for his assistance in this matter. There is an image of the splendid plaque later in this edition.

We have also been busy on other matters, one being our contact with Network Rail about the risks of crossing the line at Thurston Station - especially when leaving a westbound train (Bury direction) and exiting the station. You can read about this later. We have also met to discuss and formulate a response to the Suffolk Local Transport Plan (LTP) which seeks views from all interested parties. MARPA was also represented recently at the Greater Anglia Community Rail Conference at Ipswich.

Another important news item is the announcement from East West Rail that the non-statutory public consultation on the plans for the new line between Bedford and

Cambridge has now been launched. Do please look at the item below and consider responding individually to the consultation. MARPA will make a response, along with Railfuture, but individual responses are strongly encouraged.

I would personally like to thank the MARPA members who have or are giving up their time to represent our organisation at these various meetings.

More about all of these to follow.....

Finally I would like to wish all of our members the season's greetings. Best wishes.

Ross

More on the new CRP

Just to add some further information to the good news about the Community Rail Partnership mentioned at the start of this Newsletter by our chair.

Joining the five existing CRPs in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk overseen by Greater Anglia, the 55 mile Mid Anglia route connects Cambridge and Ipswich via Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket. Soham on the Ipswich - Ely - Peterborough route is also likely to be included within the partnership.

The funding partners GA has now got on board to support the initiative reflect that geography - from the Cambridge & Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council in the west to four local authorities in Suffolk, West Suffolk, Mid Suffolk, Ipswich Borough and Suffolk County Council. This is probably the largest collection of contributing bodies in any of the East Anglian CRPs, and reflects the enthusiasm of authorities along the route to support modal shift from road to rail and help engage communities along the line in

“their” railway. The press release from GA indicated that SCC had agreed to host the CRP officer once appointed from its base in Ipswich, an arrangement that is already working effectively with the East Suffolk CRP.

MARPA as the rail user group looks forward to working very constructively with the CRP. We see the aims of the two bodies as complementary; MARPA seeks to challenge the train operator to maintain and improve the quality of services for travellers, whilst the CRP will focus on building up local demand for rail travel through its many activities in communities right along the line. Hopefully then a virtuous circle, and exciting times ahead!

We will try to keep members informed about early developments as the new CRP starts to take shape.

Meeting with GA Train Timetable Planners - Connections for Norwich at Stowmarket

Marpa had a recent face to face meeting in Cambridge with train planners from GA about several issues that concern us. This was a rare occurrence as they generally do not go out ‘on the road’ to meet rail user groups etc. We also suggested some enhancements to the timetable that we feel would benefit both GA and their customers along our route. They agreed to consider all of the suggestions that we put to them. One matter which was agreed that had gone ‘wrong’ was some of the morning connections from Bury, Thurston & Elmswell for Norwich at Stowmarket. Generally, there is a five minute connection at Stowmarket but, in an effort to speed up the trains to Norwich from Liverpool Street, some Norwich trains were timed earlier, and so the connection was lost. Trains leaving Bury at 08.26 and 09.26 now have no connection at Stowmarket. The train planners admitted

that this was not their intention and they agreed to go back and look again at this.

UNUSUAL TRAINS OVER THE MID-ANGLIA ROUTE

In September, MARPA secretary Peter Feeney was waiting for a train at Elmswell when he took this picture of a railhead treatment train. This train is colloquially called ‘the leafbuster’ as it uses high pressure water jets to remove crushed leaf debris from the railhead to allow trains to brake and accelerate without slipping and sliding. This is vital work to ensure safety. The railway enthusiasts amongst you will note the unusual occurrence of a Class 69 locomotive on our route.



GBRf painted a class 66 in gold to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of Drax Power Station in North Yorkshire. The editor was quite surprised to find it made a couple of trips to Stowmarket in early October.

A LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE – HEADLINES FROM RAIL EAST

RAIL EAST is a quarterly newsletter produced by Railfuture East Anglia which aims to promote thinking and debate about how we best work towards achieving “a bigger and better railway” for the east. Issue 203, published in September, looked at how the recent change of government might impact on rail both nationally and closer to home. Several articles considered ongoing Access for All issues at a number of stations in the region - a moot point for MARPA, with outstanding access concerns to be resolved at both Needham Market and Stowmarket. Linked to East West Rail, an article considered the scope for developing Tempsford in north Bedfordshire - where the proposed new railway will intersect with the East Coast Mainline - as a major new town. The issue also looked at plans developed by Essex CC to work with major employers in encouraging staff to use environmentally friendly ways of commuting to work. And there was a report on celebrations during the summer to mark the 175th anniversary of the Gainsborough line from Marks Tey to Sudbury. To read more, go to <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-like/east/rail-east/RailEast-Issue-203-September-2024.pdf>

HAVE YOUR SAY – MARPA DIALOGUE WITH GREATER ANGLIA

Members of the MARPA committee meet regularly with Alan Neville (AN), Greater Anglia’s Partnerships Manager. Here are some points from our last meeting with him on 10th September.

Schedule for timetable changes: likely to be further delayed into 2026 by slow

production of the East Coast Mainline timetable revision. It was made clear that even minor additions and improvements on our line could not be considered prior to that being finalised. Delays in completing the Network Rail re-signalling project in the Cambridge area (C3R) also contributed.

Note: outside the September meeting, MARPA participated in a helpful meeting at Cambridge with a timetabler from GA. A number of ideas re timetable enhancements were explored. None was judged unrealistic or impossible. The overriding concern from the GA side remains ensuring the reliability of the system and the maintenance of high performance levels. Our lobbying for improvements will continue!

Service punctuality: AN produced data to show what regular users of the service already know - that the Mid Anglia route had poorer performance than other parts of the regional railway, much of it caused by late running trains in the freight programme to and from Felixstowe. It was difficult to see what could be done in the short term to improve matters, other than for MARPA to continue lobbying GA to press NR over maintaining the reliability of the freight timetable.

Bury platform 1 waiting facilities: still on a GA to do list; the meeting heard of other potential developments involving use of the room space behind the platform which might assist in the campaign to improve facilities.

Waiting shelters at Elmswell & Thurston: Our view is that both are shabby and uncomfortable. AN agreed to discuss potential for enhancements and report back.

Bike storage on trains & platform Customer Information Screens (CIS): the concern was over mismatch between train formations and the information available via customer information screens to passengers waiting on platforms. The practical consequence was that passengers with cycles could easily find themselves at the wrong end of the platform when boarding, the platform CIS showing incorrect details of where the cycle storage was located on the train. The problem was acknowledged, and early reports suggest that the situation subsequently appeared improved.

Book Review

'From British Rail to Freightliner – a Train Driver's story and other anecdotes, 1984-2022' by Tim Mallion

I cannot remember when the MARPA Newsletter last had a book review, and members might wonder why a group representing passenger interests between Ipswich and Cambridge would review a book that appears to be about freight. This book though is about the railway industry in the east of England, with many anecdotes relating to our route of interest. Long time Bury St Edmunds resident Tim Mallion's easy going style of writing makes the book a pleasure to read and is an absorbing look at one side of the railways that we probably do not know too much about. We in MARPA campaign on routes, facilities, services, access and general issues of interest to the passenger. We often do not think about the person up front, in the driver's cab, responsible for safely getting us where we want to be. This look at the mind of a driver and the challenges they face day to day is written in a way that brings us into the cab, dealing with accidents, incidents and the daily challenge of dealing with controllers, signallers and management.

Driver Mallion was employed by British Rail in 1984 and for the first ten years he drove passenger, mail and freight trains from Ipswich. After 1995 when privatisation meant choosing a company that employs you, he opted for Freightliner and the early years of privatisation makes for fascinating reading. With my enthusiast's hat on I found the 'reviews' of the different types of locomotives fascinating.

With my MARPA hat on, there are anecdotes from Elmswell, Thurston and up the line towards Peterborough. In the light of another article in this newsletter about concerns over the safety of the Thurston barrow crossing, Tim recounts an incident from November 2020 about a near miss on this crossing where an intermodal train struck the rear wheel of a bike being wheeled across the crossing. Clearly near misses are not rare here, and MARPA

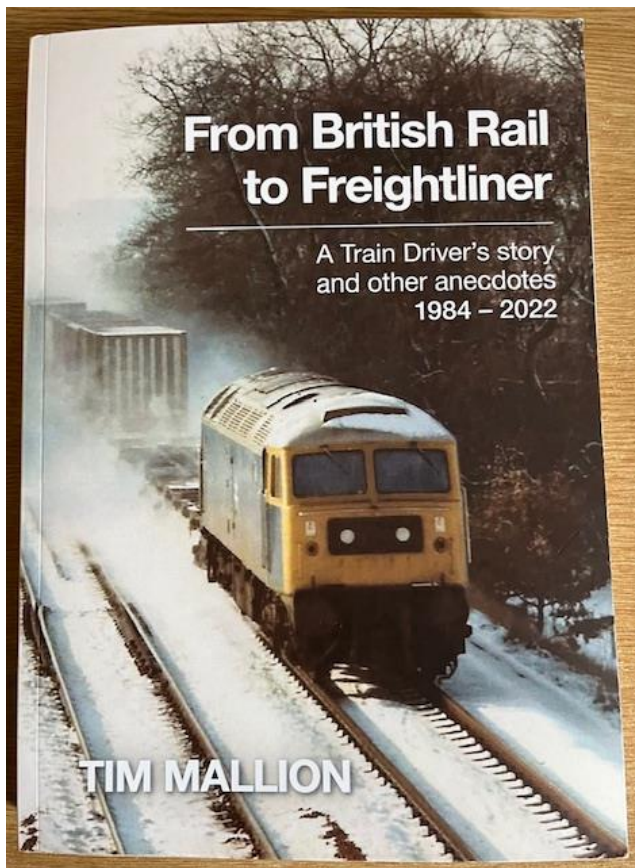
needs to ensure that this is flagged up to the industry.

I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in railways, I also think it would make a good Christmas present for a railway enthusiast. The book is softback and 256 pages long.

'From British Rail to Freightliner – a Train Driver's story and other anecdotes, 1984-2022' by **Tim Mallion** is published by

Softwood Books. Copies can be obtained from Tim Mallion direct. They are priced at £20 which includes postage and packing. Contact Tim at email

railbooktim@gmail.com or write to him at 1 Temple Close, Icklingham, BURY ST EDMUNDS, Suffolk IP28 6QD



NEAR MISS AT THURSTON STATION

Lloyd Butler, our membership secretary, recounts his wife's experience on Wednesday September 25th:

'When I think of it my heart stops and I feel an overwhelming panic!

I was on my way home from Ipswich station

to Thurston, as I do nearly every Wednesday.

But the journey had been different this time as the trains had been delayed because of power lines not working.

I probably only waited half an hour longer for my train but the platform was changed a couple of times, which meant going back to the other side of the platform.

I arrived at Thurston as usual and got off the train with about half a dozen other people.

I automatically went to cross the line following the other passengers who had alighted from the same train.

I was vaguely aware of hearing the siren, but it wasn't as clear as usual because the train I had just got off was making quite a lot of noise.

But I was already crossing when I looked passed the train I had got off and saw a train approaching towards me.

It slowly registered that I was crossing a line when a train was approaching,

There were several others, some coming home from school, in front of us and the woman following me was pulling her luggage behind her.

We both entered the car park and looked at one another!

Only then did it register that we had just crossed the path of a train coming towards us.

How could I have made such a decision - crossing the line when the siren was operating, telling us about a train approaching?

I still have recall of that incident which I am sure must have affected the other passengers crossing the line.

How could I and the other passengers ignore the noise of the warning signal?

It seems unbelievable but we did!!'



Thurston crossing view towards Ipswich



Thurston crossing view towards the car park

Pictured left are the views for passengers as they left the train and then as they turn to cross the track with only a small red light (above the green) to indicate passengers should not cross.

The tragic case at Elsenham in 2005 showed that passengers often believe the warnings refer to the train they can see, rather than another one approaching. Following the Appraisal Summary for elimination of the barrow crossing, it is understood that Network Rail have placed a small Community Infrastructure Levy bid (of around £6,000 possibly) to continue with their appraisal. Thurston Parish Council support the first option of re-opening the historic subway with lifts and stairs on both sides of the line.

We have had a discussion with Network Rail about possible ways to reduce the risks at the crossing and we are waiting to hear back from them.

MARPA responds to the Suffolk Local Transport Plan

Suffolk County Council is consulting on its draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) until the end of November. The Plan is a statutory document, intended to shape policy on transport up to 2040. Informed by responses from individuals and organisations, the aim is for SCC elected members to approve a final version early in 2025.

The committee discussed the draft at several meetings early in November. Our formal response to SCC will shortly be made available on the MARPA website. The key message - our chief concern with the draft document is that it is strong on ambition (to achieve zero carbon in transport by 2040) but very weak on practical strategies that are likely to help fulfil that ambition.

A simple example: alongside the county-wide strategy document sit a number of "area" plans centred on population centres that aim to identify key transport challenges in each locality and set out specific measures to address them. The Thurston plan - grouping the village with Elmswell and

Woolpit as a significant area of population growth - states that 8% of people locally use "active travel" or public transport to get to work, against a target of 35%. Other than "encouraging" people to walk, cycle or use the train, the plan says nothing plausible about how that huge growth - over 400% - will be achieved.

Our view overall is that the draft plan misses opportunities to support rail as a crucial contributor to a zero carbon local transport policy. We urge SCC to be clearer about its demands on the train operator if services are to attract people to make the shift from road to rail in significant numbers. That is not simply about improving rail services - it involves SCC working with the train operator to make station facilities better, ticketing more transparent and, vitally, integration of bus and rail more coherent.

Let's hope at least some of our recommendations to enhance what the LTP says about rail find their way into the approved policy in 2025.

The Local Transport Plan and the associated area plans can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/transport-planning/suffolks-local-transport-plan>

East West Rail - a major milestone arrives

You wait months for a consultation - then two come along...

You will have picked up from your usual news sources that, at last, the delayed consultation on the final stages of East West Rail has now been published. The lengthy documentation is available at <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation2024>.

MARPA will of course be responding - but we are urging individual members to make their voices heard too. Our colleagues and allies at Railfuture are preparing some guidance to help anyone interested in making a submission. Once that guidance is ready we will contact you. The deadline for responding is 24th January 2025.

The EWR project will have a transformative impact on the region generally, but quite directly on our Mid Anglia route and the communities it serves, with an hourly service scheduled from Ipswich via Cambridge onwards to Bedford, Milton Keynes and Oxford. That prospect may still be some years away, but MARPA believes it will not only facilitate longer distance journeys - with the completion of the project we can also expect faster journey times on the current Mid Anglia route. So we are urging all members to contribute to the consultation and so demonstrate support for the project.

John Drake's plaque at Ely



Further to our chairman's comment about John's plaque at Ely, this is the plaque in-situ. Should members wish to donate towards the cost, please use the same bank details as for your membership or send a cheque to our treasurer at Well House, The Street, Elmswell IP30 9BS. Should you make a donation on line please state 'plaque' and your name so we know what the money is for.