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NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025

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WELCOME

Welcome to this spring edition of the MARPA newsletter. My personal use of the railway in the past few months has been limited to taking family members to and from trains. This means taking a car onto a station forecourt and stopping, then the angst of 'how long can I stop for?' 'What happens if the train is late?' 'Who do I pay/how do I pay? It can be quite stressful, especially if the only option is to download an app onto your phone. At Bury the sign said I could pay for parking on the ticket machine – I tried, but that seemed to be only a full day's parking and I wanted to purchase an hour in case I waited over 20 minutes as the parking is 'CCTV monitored'. I downloaded the app but making a payment left me with the 'whirling plughole' symbol. It transpired when I was back home and checking to avoid the penalty, that I had paid and all was well but it was 15 minutes of stress at the station whilst trying to assist my son with a toddler and luggage. It just isn't straightforward nowadays and the threat of penalties is very concerning! On the plus side the northern entrance to Bury has much more parking and is an improvement for the 'park and ride' customer who has understood the parking charges.

I would also like to mention the 'Railway 200' celebrations this year. 2025 marks 200 years since the first 'modern' railway began operation between Stockton and Darlington in north-east England. This led to the explosion of railway building that reached Bury less than 20 years later in 1846. There are celebrations and events all over the country with more details at www.railway200.co.uk.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR



Welcome to the latest edition of the MARPA Newsletter. As this will probably hit your 'inbox' at the tail end of February/early March, I like to call it the Spring Edition. The days are

getting a little longer and should be getting a little warmer, although I am not so convinced. However, it doesn't matter what time of year it is, the railway developments continue! All the items below are picked up in more detail later in this Newsletter. The installation of the new 'Access for All' footbridge at Stowmarket, including lifts, continues apace and we are led to believe that it will be finished in May/June time. This

will be so welcomed by all users of the station but especially by those with mobility issues. We are also in discussion, and have attended meetings with, various agencies, including Greater Anglia (GA), about access at the front of the station for pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities – which we think could be much better!

At Bury, the latest footfall figures of passengers passing through the station, is now around 835,000 and continues to rise significantly. We don't think that the ticketing provision at the station is satisfactory, and we will be raising this with GA at our next meeting with them. On the positive side at Bury we are now seeing the preparation for the new cycle hub, near to the newer northern entrance, which will create many more spaces for cyclists and perhaps encourage more passengers to leave the car at home? We continue to press for better waiting facilities on Platform 1 – let's face it, apart from the canopy, there are none. Definitely room for improvement! We are currently monitoring the developments of East West Rail (EWR) as, long term, this will undoubtedly affect our line. The recent announcements by the government about the Oxford to Cambridge arc and the 'Silicon Valley of Europe' are all significant. The Non-Statutory Consultation has now closed and all views are being considered. The forthcoming Statutory Consultation will start sometime at the end of the year.

Finally, can I remind you of our AGM on Saturday 29 March at 14.00 at The Friends Meeting House betwixt St John's Street and St Andrew's Street (North), Bury St Edmunds. The main focus will be on our new Community Rail Partnership - I hope to see you there.
Bye for now....
Ross

NEW CYCLE HUB AT BURY ST EDMUNDS

Greater Anglia is to install a new cycle hub at Bury St Edmunds Rail Station, in a £200,000 project funded with the help of the Department for Transport (through funds managed by Sustrans), Suffolk County Council, and West Suffolk District Council.

Located at the recently created northern entrance to the station, and replacing the former car wash waiting room, the Cycle Hub will offer 52 cycle spaces on a first come, first served basis.

The new hub will be fully enclosed and covered by additional lighting and CCTV to enhance security.

As part of the Cycle Hub, there will also be a special access-controlled space for 16 cycles, offering additional security. Access to the access-controlled area will be via a SMART Card, which can be purchased for £25 per year.

In addition, a new walking and cycle path, and speed bumps will be installed on the northern approach road to the station to improve safety for people walking or cycling to the station.

The work is due to start this month and is expected to be completed in the spring.

UPDATE ON THE MID ANGLIA CRP

Members will already know that Greater Anglia and the contributing local authorities have confirmed funding arrangements for the new Community Rail Partnership. We are now told that Suffolk County Council is in the early stages of making the all-important appointment to the post of Partnership Officer. There is (a bit) more information in the recent media release from GA <https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/about-us/news-desk/news-articles/ipswich-cambridge-community-rail-partnership-gets-underway>.

At our next catch up meeting with Alan Neville from GA early in March we hope to get further information on some of the practical issues associated with the CRP – not least, how MARPA will engage with the CRP in its formal Terms of Reference. MARPA brings considerable collective insight and understanding to the table in considering rail services and passenger facilities, and we expect the new CRP to draw upon that expertise in establishing its priorities for engagement with communities along the line. It will also doubtless interest members to find out more about the name of the new CRP – still to be agreed. We expect that there will be more information to share with members at the AGM in Bury St Edmunds on 29 March (see separate item in this issue).

MID ANGLIA PASSENGER NUMBERS CONTINUE TO GROW

The latest official statistics from the Office for Road & Rail indicate that demand for rail travel since COVID has increased substantially on our route. In the year April 2023 - March 2024 footfall at every station has increased by at least 14% since the previous year, with larger still growth (of at least 20%) at Needham, Elmswell, Thurston and Bury St Edmunds. Every station between Bury and Ipswich now has an annual footfall of at least 100,000. Only at Dullingham has footfall yet to exceed volumes last reached in 2019. Meanwhile at Soham, on the route to Ely, March & Peterborough, in its second full year of operation footfall has increased by nearly 20% - to just over 65,000 – from the previous year. Passenger numbers at Bury are now very close to those at Stowmarket – each looks likely to achieve around a million users annually in the next few years – even though the Stowmarket figures also include passengers using Intercity services on the Norwich - London Liverpool Street route.

This ongoing growth in volumes strengthens the case MARPA continues to make to Greater Anglia for an increase in service

frequency between Cambridge and Ipswich. It also supports the case for improved passenger facilities on the westbound platform at Bury. We are also asking GA to review existing facilities at Elmswell and Thurston – the current shelters (eastbound at Elmswell, westbound at Thurston) look shabby and offer minimal comfort to waiting passengers, in marked contrast to the shelters provided, for instance, at Kennett. Our lobbying on these and related issues continues!

MARPA AND SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL'S RAIL POLICY - NEXT STEPS

We submitted a response to SCC's draft Local Transport Plan at the end of 2024. You can find a link to our response on the News page of the MARPA website (<http://www.marpa.org.uk/news.htm>). A revised version of the Plan goes to a meeting of the full council in the coming months; we hope that some of our suggestions for improvement find their way into this final draft.

More encouragingly, we understand that SCC intends to update its Rail Prospectus. The current version is now nearly a decade old – and much has occurred since to alter the rail landscape in terms of travel patterns and demand. The Prospectus outlines in some detail the areas where SCC would want to work with partners like Greater Anglia, Network Rail and Transport East to enhance services within Suffolk. It is an opportunity to promote an agenda for rail travel that exploits its zero carbon potential. As such, MARPA is keen to support work on the document as it develops.

NEW TECHNOLOGY TO BENEFIT TRAVELLERS AT STOWMARKET

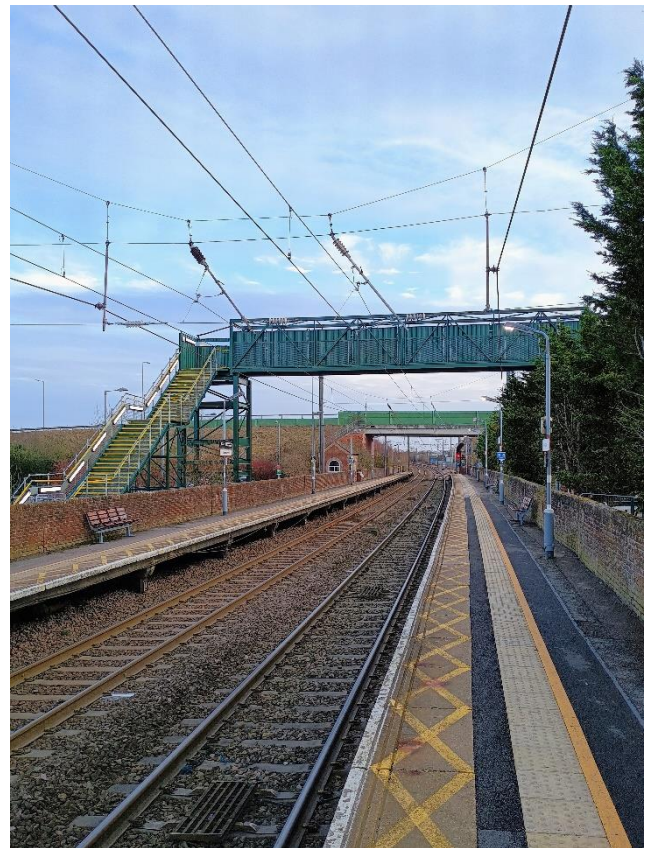
The first stage in delivering the long awaited new footbridge & lifts at Stowmarket station was completed in January. The existing footbridge, installed during the works for the completion of the Great Eastern Mainline

(GEML) electrification north of Ipswich during the late 1980s, was removed and replaced by a temporary structure. Following two further weekend possessions in mid-May and the start of July, we understand from Greater Anglia that the permanent new structure with lifts will be installed and fully operational by early summer 2025.



The old footbridge at Stowmarket

The scheme, funded by the Access for All programme, addresses a serious need: annual footfall at Stowmarket, a major junction serving both intercity traffic on GEML and the heavily subscribed regional routes between Ipswich and Cambridge/Ely/Peterborough, continues to grow post-COVID and is likely to reach a million in the near future. For travellers unable to access the existing steep footbridge between platforms, the only current alternative is to use the level crossing at the west end of the station, which is frequently down due to the volume of passenger and freight traffic on the line.



The temporary footbridge

The innovative modular design of the proposed new bridge has excited considerable interest: the bridge will be the first of its kind to be installed on the UK rail network. According to the industry, the modular concept behind the new design, plus the fact that it is largely constructed from steel rather than concrete, means the bridge is both lighter and cheaper than traditional alternatives, as well as being much easier to install – à la Meccano of old, the new bridge will arrive in sections at the station and be assembled on site. And apart from the all-important “plug & play” lift modules, the new structure will also benefit from a roof, a welcome touch of civilization its predecessor lacked. As with Greater Anglia’s decision to go with the Stadler FLIRT design for fleet upgrade, this project certainly demonstrates Network Rail’s readiness to embrace genuinely state of the art technology for essential infrastructure, something everyone interested in promoting rail usage should applaud.



The worksite compound

One thing anyone using the temporary bridge will need to take into account is the fact that getting from one platform to the other definitely takes more time – the footings on each side are located in the respective car parks, the temporary bridge itself is located some metres further away from the various station buildings and the bridge itself has more steps. A good place for a cardiovascular workout!

(based on an article in RAIL EAST issue 205, February 2025)

ADDRESSING ACCESS PROBLEMS AT STOWMARKET

The good news at Stowmarket is that work is progressing to install a fully compliant and accessible bridge between the two platforms, as reported in this issue. Less good is the status quo for pedestrian and disabled station users, where MARPA has supported calls from local councillors and the Mid Anglia Disability Forum for Greater

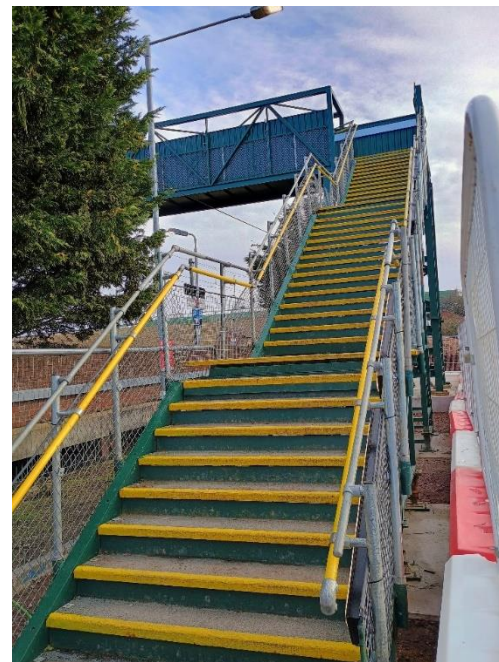
Anglia to review and improve current access arrangements.

The principal concerns are

- (1) disabled parking arrangements at the front of the station, including the lack of a dropped kerb anywhere near the two Blue Badge parking spaces reserved close to the station entrance but some distance from the ramped access to platform 2 and
- (2) the absence of any pedestrian safe route marking anywhere on the station site.

The impression existing arrangements give, regrettably, is that able-bodied drivers looking to park at the station are prioritized over all other users. To address this, a site meeting was held at the end of January, where GA managers, officers and councillors from the various relevant councils – town, district and county – plus representatives from the Disability Forum and MARPA spent time examining the issues and discussing short and longer term improvements.

It was a productive and positive session, with clear agreement about definite areas for improvement. Outcomes and next steps will be covered in the Newsletter as they emerge in the coming months.



The temporary footbridge

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. MARPA is affiliated to Railfuture and shares its objectives for rail in the region.

Issue 204, published in December 2024, includes articles on the logistical challenges of increasing freight services to and from Felixstowe – thus reducing HGV traffic on the A12 and A14 – and the ongoing fight to restore rail links between Cambridge and Haverhill and Wisbech. There is also coverage of the news that the Mid Anglia route is at long last to get its own Community Rail Partnership, as well as updates on progress with East West Rail and Norfolk County Council's decision to review the case for additional stations to meet latent demand in the greater Norwich area.

To read more, go to <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-like/east/rail-east/RailEast-Issue-204-December-2024.pdf>

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025 MARPA AGM – Saturday 29 March 2025

Our annual meeting this year will take place at The Friend's Meeting House, St John's Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1SJ starting at 14.00. Please see map for location. This year our speaker will be Sarah Grove, the Community Rail Partnership Project Officer for Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Rail User Group / Community Rail Partnership. Sarah will be able to tell us what to expect from our own Community Rail Partnership, that was announced in October last year, and is in the process of being set up. Alan Neville, the Stakeholder, Community and Customer Engagement Manager from Greater Anglia will also speak and be able

to update us with matters on our local line from the train operator's perspective. It should be a very interesting meeting and we hope to see you there. Light refreshments will be provided.

The location of the Friends' Meeting House is shown below. It is the green space below 'The Bushel' in the bottom left corner. The map shows the station and the walk from the station will take around 15/20 minutes via Station Hill and Ipswich Street into St John's Street.

