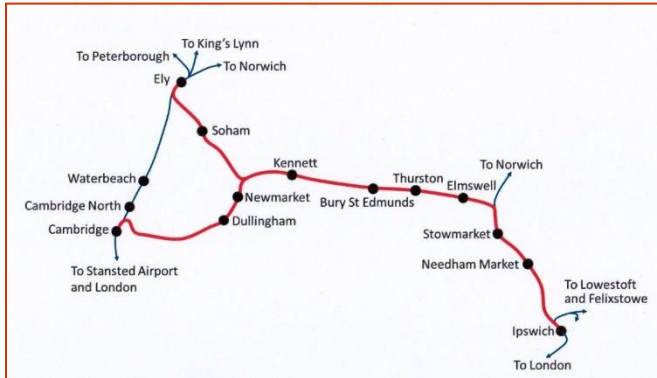


MARPA

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association 

NEWSLETTER Autumn 2025

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WELCOME

Welcome to this Autumn edition of the MARPA newsletter. Our committee members have been busy talking with passengers, raising concerns with Greater Anglia and generally travelling around our route. Our committee member Ben has been especially busy this summer travelling around the region attending Railway 200 events in Colchester through to the celebrations held over on the Fen Line for the 180 years of the opening of Watlington station near to Downham Market. He is also one of the station adopters for Cambridge. Ben gets around but always gives feedback for our route which we can pass back to Greater Anglia as to how they and indeed we in MARPA, can do things better.



THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR



As I travelled back from Cambridge very recently, following a meeting with our own Peter Feeney and Alan Neville from GA, it crossed my mind how lucky we were to have a local train operator of

the calibre of GA. Trains that are relatively new, clean and mostly punctual and it set my mind thinking about our role as a Rail User Group. What are we here for if GA is getting everything right? Well, they are getting most things right, but not everything, and that is why we sit in the wings acting as their 'critical friend'. In fact, the meeting that Peter Feeney and I had attended, as mentioned above, was to discuss again matters that we had previously raised with GA and which needed revisiting. You will see the notes of our meeting(s) with Alan further on in this newsletter and it is worthwhile remembering that we are not a GA appreciation society. We will tell it to them as it is, warts and all, even if they would realistically not want to hear it. We will however do it politely, constructively and with transparency.

You will see later on that we are also keeping a close eye on the 'overcrowding' issues into and out of Cambridge during the weekly peaks. Too often there are 3 car instead of 4 car trains on these services and it really makes a difference.

We are also talking to GA about the new footbridge at Stowmarket, which is due to be installed, with lifts, by the end of the year.

Meantime however the temporary replacement means that passengers wishing to transfer from, for example, a train off our line heading towards Ipswich and they want to catch a connecting train to Norwich now must walk further within the already tight timescale that they have. We know that many passengers have missed this connection. Whilst GA acknowledges that there is a problem, we have seen little progress on this. Perhaps the distance to be walked between the platforms could be reduced, or that every train heading towards Norwich stops so if a connection is missed then the wait is only 28 minutes, or so, instead of the 58 or so, as now. The audible announcement at Bury station, for example, is a little infuriating when it tells you to allow more time to cross between the platforms at Stowmarket when you use the station.

Travelling from Bury, of course, you will be arriving on a GA train, upon which you have absolutely no control!

Finally, I can end with some positive news. Firstly, we have welcomed our ninth local council on board, as corporate members. Wood Ditton Parish Council are the latest body to join us. Welcome to you.

Secondly, we know that the administrative 'Officer' has been appointed to the new local Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and that a Chair will be in post very soon. We are hopeful that MARPA will have a very close relationship with the CRP and that we can all start working together soon for the benefit of the local railway. Finally did anyone manage to visit the Rail 200 Inspiration train at either Norwich or Lowestoft recently? My wife, Judith, and I did and we very much enjoyed it. Were you very lucky and get tickets for 'The Greatest Gathering' in Derby at the beginning of the month? The videos of the three days looked brilliant, and it just

proves what an amazing family the railway is.

That's all from me this time and we will be in touch with you again in the Autumn. As ever, if you have anything that you think that we would want to hear, then please get in touch. Best wishes.

Ross

MARPA LIAISON MEETING WITH GREATER ANGLIA, JULY 2025

Engaging with the train operator - notes from July 2025 liaison meeting

MARPA met with Alan Neville (AN) from Greater Anglia (GA) on 15 July 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 GA are summarised below. It is worth stressing that the concerns outlined below need to be put in a wider context of generally punctual services provided by high quality trains and helpful staff. The strengths in current performance are reflected in increasing passenger footfall – which can itself lead to problems.

- **Short formation trains on peak services**

Monitoring by MARPA over the past month (18 June - 11 July) has indicated that over 25% of trains on the 0618 & 0656 services from Ipswich to Cambridge consisted of 3 rather than 4 car units. Utilising a 3 car unit means a reduction of approximately 27% in seating capacity. This results in very crowded trains, and on occasion leads to prospective passengers being left on the platform.

AN suggested that in the period under review there had been availability issues of 4 car units, with some extra difficulty caused by overnight Network Rail (NR) activity around Norwich, leading to problems in dispatching units from Crown Point depot. He reiterated (a) that it was GA's aim to run the vast majority of Mid Anglia services – all but two at the end of the daily timetable – as 4 car units and (b) that morning peak services westbound (0618 & 0656 services

from Ipswich) and evening peaks eastbound in particular (1646 & 1746 services from Cambridge) ought to be rostered by 4 car units other than in exceptional circumstances. The data we shared with him suggested that this is not currently happening. If the recent trend continues it was agreed that further investigation would be needed to clarify exactly why 3 car units are being deployed when GA policy indicates otherwise. It was also noted that passenger feedback to MARPA pointed out that conductors on shorter formation services did not always apologise for crowding or offer any explanation. AN commented that conductors ought to be making an announcement in those circumstances. Since the meeting, there have been welcome signs that 4 car trains are being deployed more routinely - MARPA will continue its monitoring.

- **New timetable May 2026**

Whilst it is likely that some morning gaps in the current timetable will be addressed, it is very unlikely that we will see further stops at Kennett. And the long term call for a later final service from Cambridge remains off the agenda until such time as NR completes its resignalling project across the wider Cambridge network. Serious disappointment was expressed at the very scant improvements to the Mid Anglia timetable likely to occur in the near future, although MARPA recognises that the obstacles to an improved timetable lie outside GA's sphere of operation. After the meeting it was agreed that a helpful way forward would be to involve NR in a meeting facilitated by GA.

- **Community Rail Partnership**

AN reported that an appointment to the officer post had been confirmed. It was likely the new officer would commence work during August. An appointment to the chair post was due presently. There was as yet no clarity about the involvement of MARPA with the new body, despite some earlier discussion where - as with the arrangement for the Bittern & Wherry line CRPs in Norfolk - it looked as if MARPA would feature in the managing group. AN agreed that input from

MARPA to the new CRP would be helpful and he would work to help secure a positive outcome.

- **Thurston - safety of barrow crossing**

AN suggested that a three way meeting between MARPA, GA & NR might be helpful. As yet there is no news on whether NR had published its feasibility study regarding estimated costs of safer crossing options between platforms.

- **Bury - Cambridge platform facilities**

Some encouraging news. Following internal discussion within GA involving senior management responsible for assets, it looks as if prospects for improved facilities, including a waiting room and toilets, are better than we had previously thought. In particular, it now appears that the intention from GA to find a commercial tenant for the old Station Master's House need not compromise any plans to redevelop unoccupied space behind the platform for the benefit of the growing number of passengers using the station. MARPA reiterated its view that this development could be an early project where the new CRP might look to explore funding sources to help significantly upgrade passenger facilities at the station.

- **Stowmarket footbridge & lifts**

AN confirmed that GA was confident that this delayed project was now in track for completion by the end of 2025. There was positive discussion about the desirability of introducing some mitigations whilst the temporary footbridge is in place. The key concern from a user perspective is the extra time required to change platforms whilst the temporary crossing arrangements are in place. In particular, for passengers on Ipswich bound services wishing to change for Norwich trains, the already tight connection time is made more challenging by the extra time required to cross. AN assured us that local rail management was keen to determine whether any time saving

measures could be introduced whilst the temporary bridge remains in place.

- **Where is the cycle space on my train?**

The concern is that there is often a mismatch between what is indicated on the electronic platform Passenger Information Screens and the actual location of the cycle storage space on a given service. AN repeated that this is an issue of which GA is aware, and discussion with the relevant software provider to fix errors is ongoing.

- **Local ticketing anomalies**

The issue was the absence of off peak return tickets from Elmswell and Thurston to various stations on the route. AN assured the meeting that the anomalies had been picked up and would be addressed in the September refresh of the ticketing software. He suggested MARPA monitor this and report back any unresolved issues for attention.

- **Railway 200 & Mid Anglia route**

Other routes are already served by CRPs, which have taken on the task of promoting the Railway 200 celebrations. So far, there has been no sign of such activity on our route. Since the meeting, AN has engaged station adopters with a view to distributing bunting etc for stations so the travelling public was made more aware of this special anniversary.

One small step...

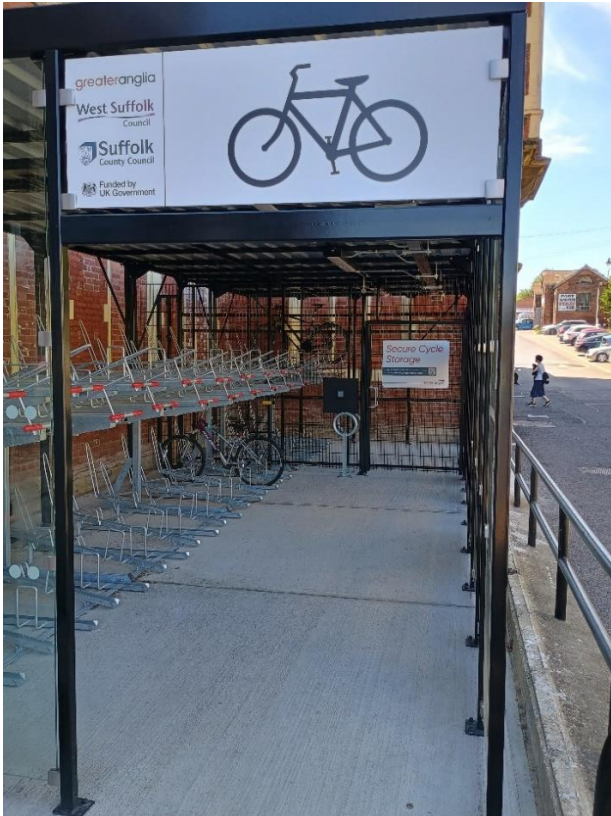
Promoting active travel in Bury St Edmunds

Progress has been made in recent months to make active travel to and from Bury station that bit easier for travellers walking, wheeling and cycling as part of a bigger journey. More human powered journeys to and from stations means fewer avoidable car journeys, less pollution from vehicle emissions, less pressure on constrained parking facilities - and travellers who are healthier and happier. What they call a win-win...

The existing cycle storage outside the main (south) entrance to the station is now

supplemented by a new facility on the north side, right next to the station access that was opened up to rail users in 2022. The handsome new provision, announced at the start of 2025, includes a secure facility for 16 bikes accessed via a SMART card available for an annual £25 charge. The new cycle hub also has space for 52 cycles available on a first come first served basis. As well as protection from the elements, the hub has lighting and is monitored by CCTV. The overall high quality of the new Bury hub contrasts with the extreme variability of cycle storage arrangements at other stations on the Mid Anglia route. This is an issue we will return to in the next Newsletter.

Another very welcome – and seriously overdue – development in Bury is a new pedestrian and cyclist zebra crossing on Tayfen Road near the junction with St Andrew's Street North. The crossing has been funded by the developers of a large adjacent apartment construction now nearing completion. For years rail users have complained of the danger associated with crossing the constantly busy Tayfen Road en route to or from the town centre. The solution effected some years ago by Suffolk County Council was to construct a Pelican crossing approximately 150 metres the wrong side of the road for access to the town centre. Unsurprisingly, it probably ranks high in the national league table of unused road crossings. The new crossing certainly takes the risk out of Tayfen Road for pedestrians and is to be commended as a positive move in encouraging more pedestrian traffic to and from the station.



The new cycle store at Bury Station



The new Tayfen Road pedestrian crossing.

INTERESTING NON PASSENGER WORKINGS!



On the 25th June, the first of several unusual moves took place. This involved 'vintage' locomotives around 60 years old moving redundant track machines from Harwich and taking them to Derby (whether for re-use or scrapping I don't know)



A 'Railway 200' liveried locomotive, although on a DB loco that is red already only the logos give it away. Fresh from 'The Greatest Gathering' in Derby 66200 hurries an intermodal service to East Midland Gateway past Elmwell Hall Farm on a scorching August morning.

IMPROVING SERVICES AT KENNETT

Update on Passenger Experience at Kennett Station

Local rail users at Kennett have been frustrated by the number of short 3 car trains that are appearing on peak trains. One

regular commuter said that “there is always a groan when a 3-coach train turns up”. “Everyone knows that it will be hard to find a seat and may mean standing for the whole journey into Cambridge”. “It is a real scramble by the time the train reaches Newmarket”.

It is a particular problem for the 07.05 and 07.42 trains to Cambridge at the morning peak (06.18 and 06.56 services from Ipswich) and the 16.46 and 17.46 peak returns from Cambridge. All busy trains, where a nearly 27% reduction in seating makes a big difference. Kennett is a key commuter station for Cambridge, both for workers and students at the 6th form colleges. The Facebook survey reported previously in this Newsletter showed the degree of local frustration with the trains that don't stop at Kennett during the day. The allocation of 3 car sets at peak times just makes matters worse!

We now add some further pressures. East Cambridgeshire Council approved the development of a ‘Garden Village’ in Kennett, 5 minutes’ walk from the station. It is now being built and the first residents are already in. There is also a current planning application for a development on the nearby old Animal Hospital Trust site which, if approved, could create another 860 homes. All of these properties are attractive to Cambridge commuters. There are great work opportunities in Cambridge but housing is prohibitively expensive. Kennett is the answer for many people. It will increase further with the opening of Cambridge South station next year. Unfortunately, Kennett appears to be ignored by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) in their strategic planning. MARPA is trying to raise the profile.

Apart from the pressure on the trains, there are major highways and facilities issues at the station itself. A local passenger said “it is completely chaotic at drop-off and pick-up time”. The car park is very small and people are trying to turn in a limited space.

The entrance is right next to a hump back bridge affecting visibility. Pedestrians, cycles and cars are not segregated. At the same

time they are having to “guess” whether there is a car speeding over the bridge, hidden from view. Passengers are having to negotiate this dangerous exit as there is no footpath on the Station side of the road. A parent of one of the students told me that she was so worried about the risk of an accident here that she “always waits until after the rest of the passengers have left before arriving to pick up her son”.

Additionally, it is worth remembering that said bridge is deemed weak and so weight restricted – buses are banned, meaning that Kennett is currently left out of rail replacement bus schedules when engineering work closes the line.

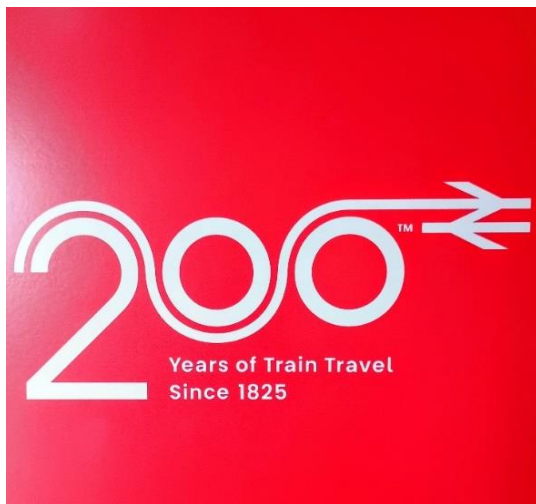
MARPA is submitting a response to the existing planning application demonstrating the current risks, and asking for mitigation measures such as improving the entry/exit by extending the car parking area, increasing the number of spaces, and improving cycle facilities.

John Ford, July 2025

A SPECIAL TRAIN VISITS EAST ANGLIA

Of course, every year marks the anniversary of something memorable - but for anyone with an interest in railways, 2025 represents a very special milestone. Yes, the 200th year since steam (as opposed to horse) powered trains with fare paying passengers began operating in the north east of England. 27 September 1825, to be precise. The rest, as they say, is history – a genuinely world changing technology...

To mark this milestone, Network Rail and the National Railway Museum in York have collaborated to create a four carriage exhibition train, aptly entitled the Inspiration train. Visiting up to 60 venues over twelve months, the basic concept is to offer a snapshot of the railway through three filters - its history, the engineering science that makes railways work and the diverse range of careers available to anyone within the industry.



So whether you're a young person thinking about job opportunities or someone older intrigued by how signalling functions, the technology used to keep the railway safe or how the nineteenth century railway had a huge impact on how we tell the time – it's all available to experience in the Inspiration train.

The train has had stays in Lowestoft and Norwich during August. Certainly, on its first day in Norwich a very wide age range was evident amongst visitors. And many of the exhibits are genuinely hands-on – lots of buttons to press, bridges to build and sand to experiment with (a very intriguing item, as shown in the image). Rail staff on hand were unfailingly helpful and informative. In sum, a well arranged and efficiently organised event, well worth an hour of anyone's time. And free admission!



Hands-on fun - creating a railway courtesy of sand and clever software

The train is due to have further dates during the first months of 2026 – if it should return to the east (Cambridge has been identified as a possible venue) then definitely something to note in the diary.

For more information go to <https://railway200.co.uk/inspiration/>

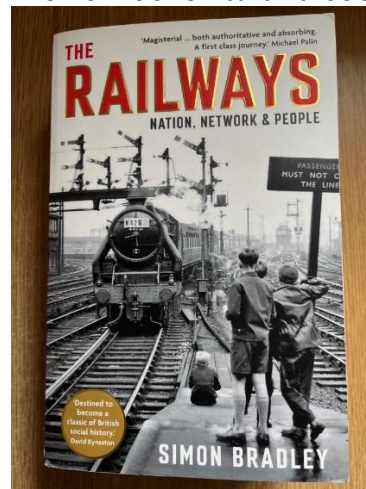
Book Review

The Railways, Nation, Network & people' by Simon Bradley

In this 'Railway 200' year I have been given a copy of this book as a gift. It initially looks slightly daunting, mainly because of its size being 645 pages long and the densely printed text. This is not a dry railway history book of facts and figures, it is an eminently readable social history of the United Kingdom based around railways and there is a lot to learn. The author takes the reader on an imaginary trip in 1862 and looks at pretty much everything from the upholstery of the carriage through to the meals, toilets, your fellow passengers, railway crime, then onto tracks and signalling. In every section I found much that was new and fascinating to me. Bradley even discusses horse boxes and horse racing at Newmarket.

The book is not new for Railway 200, as it was first published in 2016 and became 'Sunday Times History Book of The Year'. I heartily recommend it.

The Railways, Nation, Network & people' by Simon Bradley is published by Profile Books Ltd and costs £11.99



ALL CHANGE AT LIVERPOOL STREET!!

Just to alert readers who may not have caught up with major plans to redevelop the station. There is more information via the link below. It's apparent that over the course of a number of years travellers' experience at the station is likely to encounter some significant disruption – let's hope that the extensive planning involved at what is currently Britain's busiest station will include lots of mitigation. MARPA will keep readers informed of developments via the Newsletter.

<https://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/news/network-rails-application-to-transform-londons-busiest-station-validated-by-city-of-london>

Our next Newsletter is due to be published in November 2025