

NEWSLETTER Winter 2025

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WELCOME

Welcome to this winter edition of the MARPA newsletter. We bring news of the new Stowmarket station lift/footbridge, the return of the 'Inspiration' exhibition train and Class 99 locomotives appear for the first time.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

At times it has been a somewhat frustrating year and, as I sat down to reflect on that fact and to prepare these notes, three pieces of 'good news' bubbled to the surface. I shouldn't really use an analogy that involves London buses, but you will understand what I mean!

Firstly, we are delighted that the new footbridge at Stowmarket station was installed very recently and should be open for public use early in the new year. You can read more about this, with some images later in the Newsletter. Read on.

Secondly, we received some encouraging news about the waiting facilities on the Cambridge bound platform at Bury. MARPA has long been pressing for improvements to

be made, and we hope now that we are pushing against an opening door. We understand that staff from Greater Anglia (GA) were very recently inspecting the accommodation and we hear that the local area manager is keen for improvements to be made. Funding is always an issue in circumstances like this, so we will monitor this situation closely with fingers crossed but at the same time optimistic.

Thirdly, we received a lovely card from the sisters (Sylvia & Jean) of our former Chair John Drake. It has been nearly two years since John left us and, as the solicitors are now close to completing the paperwork in respect of John's estate, Sylvia and Jean have sent MARPA a very generous donation. We are very grateful to them both for this kind gift.

In contrast to the above, you will be aware that MARPA has challenged GA over the removal of the physical ticket office at Bury Station which disappeared during the refurbishment of 2022. We say that this was done without the required public consultation and, as a result, that customers have been severely prejudiced. The single member of staff available was required to oversee the new ticket gates, thus reducing their ability to assist customers with their travel/ticketing queries. We are delighted

that we have now learned that, early in 2026, the GA staffing at the station is to be substantially increased, so that not only will there be more staff present at any one time, but they will be on duty for longer. Although this is excellent news, we will be monitoring the situation closely to ensure that all staff are fully trained on all aspects of customer service and ticketing so that the full service, as available at other ticket offices, can be offered.

Sadly, the rolling stock provision on the two morning and two evening peak services into and out of Cambridge is still disappointing. Despite the reasoning and reassurances from GA, all too often, the train is short formed. The issue is covered under GA Liaison in this issue, and we will continue to monitor the situation.

As I close, may I also mention that the Railway 200 Inspiration train will be visiting Cambridge over the weekend of 31 January/1 February. MARPA will be in attendance to support this event. And don't forget that the next MARPA AGM will take place on Saturday 21 March 2026 in Bury St Edmunds. Please spread the word(s). Finally, I cannot let this newsletter be published without mentioning the fact that GA has now passed into public ownership. It is currently 'service as normal'. We have had our niggles with GA over some issues but overall they are a superb rail company and provide an excellent service. Long may this continue.

See you in 2026.

Best wishes.

Ross

GREATER ANGLIA STATION ADOPTION AWARDS CEREMONY, 17 October 2025

This event, held in the 'Railway 200' year, was very special, seeing as there were more prizes (plaques) given out than ever before, and there was a record turnout of more than 100 adopters! As you will probably know, the volunteers who become station adopters put a huge effort into making their stations both wildlife-friendly and welcoming to the travelling public. The well-appointed venue for the event, as in previous years, was the

Sir Bobby Robson suite at Ipswich Town's Portman Road stadium.

The day began with a talk from Jonathan Denby, who gave us an upbeat outline of what was happening throughout the Greater Anglia Network. This was followed by a presentation from James Brennan of Railscape, who told us how they come to resolve all the various problems at stations from reporting by adopters, via Alan Neville, to completion and having the faults rectified. His presentation underlined how the adopters are really the 'eyes & ears' of the railway.

Then we had Colin Burcombe, who comes from the Community Rail Network, and is their local lead officer for the Midlands and East Anglia. Colin outlined what they do, and how they, in collaboration with Greater Anglia, local community Rail Partnerships and station Adopters, help benefit and promote railway lines, in particular 'rural' lines, which, obviously, Greater Anglia has a lot of!

After an excellent buffet lunch and seed swap (very relevant for a large group with a keen interest in station greenery!) we went back for a well illustrated presentation from Alan Neville. He outlined just how much valuable work the volunteers of the adopter network do at well over 100 stations. This was followed by one of his famous quizzes, which this year, because of 'Railway 200', was built around a railway theme.

We then had the Award Ceremony itself, the highlight of the day. It was good to see a lot of stations so well cared for throughout the Greater Anglia area.

The adopter team at Dullingham on the Mid Anglia route was named Best Adopter Group for their ongoing work to transform the areas alongside the platforms into gardens with stunning floral displays, delighting passengers as well as creating a haven for local wildlife.

Even better, Dullingham adopters Learne Hind and Jacqui Lacey-Eresh also received the Best Newcomer Award in recognition of their work to hold an open day at the station for the National Open Garden Scheme and also for helping to care for Newmarket station. Well done to them! With adopters so

committed, the new Community Rail Partnership will be building on some impressively strong foundations.

Ben Walsh

MARPA LIAISON MEETING WITH GREATER ANGLIA

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

MARPA met with Alan Neville (AN) from Greater Anglia (GA) in Newmarket on 4th November 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 detailed below.

At the start of the meeting AN summarised a number of key points regarding current GA performance and developments as they affect the travelling public. His report noted high levels of service punctuality, customer satisfaction and station improvements as well as highlighting recent developments including the opening of Beaulieu Park station in Essex on the Great Eastern Mainline and events marking the Railway 200 celebrations.

A fuller account has been sent to members alongside the Newsletter.

The chair then summarised the current state of play with regard to MARPA concerns about ticketing arrangements at Bury station. There will be more on this issue in our Spring 2026 issue where we hope to report positive news linked to this issue.

Short formation trains on peak services

As of our meeting date (04/11/25) ongoing monitoring of the situation indicated some improvements regarding use of 4 car units on peak services, but it remained the case that 3 car units continue to be substituted on a weekly basis. AN cited a GA analysis suggesting that across the regional network 90% of services rostered for 4 car units operated as rostered; he recognised that this still meant that approximately 1 in 10 services continued to have less than optimum capacity. He proposed that it would be helpful for MARPA to have some discussion with a relevant fleet rostering colleague which he could facilitate.

Subsequent to the meeting, the chair and secretary met to evaluate progress on the peak trains issue. They agreed that there were signs of improvements in terms of four car deployment on peak services. The helpful offer of a meeting was put on hold, to be revisited subject to improvements being sustained.

New timetable May 2026

Some positive if modest news is anticipated regarding service changes in the May 2026 timetable. AN hoped to be able to report in more detail at the MARPA AGM on 21 March next year.

Community Rail Partnership

With the chair and officer appointments now confirmed, the first formal meeting of the new body is due to take place in December. MARPA still awaits confirmation as to governance arrangements and some clarification as to how we will contribute.

Thurston - safety of barrow crossing

AN wasn't able to shed any light on where things stand regarding options for a safer method of crossing the line. We understand dialogue continues between the critical players, Network Rail & MSDC. (See the update on this topic elsewhere in this issue.)

Bury - Cambridge platform facilities

The project was confirmed as being on GA's wish list, although it remains unclear if this means it now features on any future capital works schedule. MARPA will be pursuing this at a meeting involving the leader of WSDC late in November and we will update members subsequent to that.

Stowmarket footbridge & lifts

AN confirmed media reports (as MARPA had already surmised) that work to install the new modular footbridge/lift will be taking place over the final weekend of November. After testing, the aim is to have the new crossing fully open to travellers early in January 2026. In the meantime the much vilified temporary bridge will remain in use. It was acknowledged that the introduction of a

slightly quicker access from the bridge onto platform 2

(facilitated during the summer 2025) had helped make changing trains from the Mid Anglia route onto services for Diss & Norwich somewhat less stressful. See also the update on the new bridge elsewhere in this issue.

Where is the cycle space on my train?

AN was unable to say exactly what lay behind the mismatch between train formations and information on platform screens, so the issue is still pertinent and remains on our monitoring schedule.

ARE WE NEARER A SAFER PASSENGER CROSSING AT THURSTON STATION?

The longstanding issue of replacing the barrow crossing at Thurston station with a safer, accessible for all alternative has perhaps moved a stage nearer a positive outcome. Network Rail (NR) has finally shared its report identifying possible options with Mid Suffolk District Council. The council has agreed substantial funding (over half a million pounds) to commission yet another feasibility study. The plan is that the study will recommend which of the NR options should be pursued, and identify projected costs (spoiler; whatever scheme is eventually adopted, we are talking here about a sum well in excess of £5 million). It is worth noting that funding for any scheme is very unlikely to come from the Department for Transport's Access for All programme, since at Thurston the route to and from the westbound platform is already fully accessible. The issue is the inherent safety of that route, but this fact doesn't help move the station nearer the top of the (very long) list of stations in search of funding. Liz McGregor of the Campaign for Thurston station (CATS) responded to current developments as follows.

"CATS is pleased that MSDC is pushing this project forward but is concerned about the very high fee that NR is charging for yet another appraisal without any indication of why it is costing so much... CATS is strongly

in favour of the option to reopen the subway and is against the unsightly footbridge proposal at the eastern end of the platforms, which will also necessitate losing scarce parking spaces... As a passing comment, whatever happens, we're sure that every local resident in Thurston will be looking forward to a more peaceful future without the increasingly frequent intrusive sirens." MARPA will continue to monitor developments at Thurston and report back to members via the Newsletter.

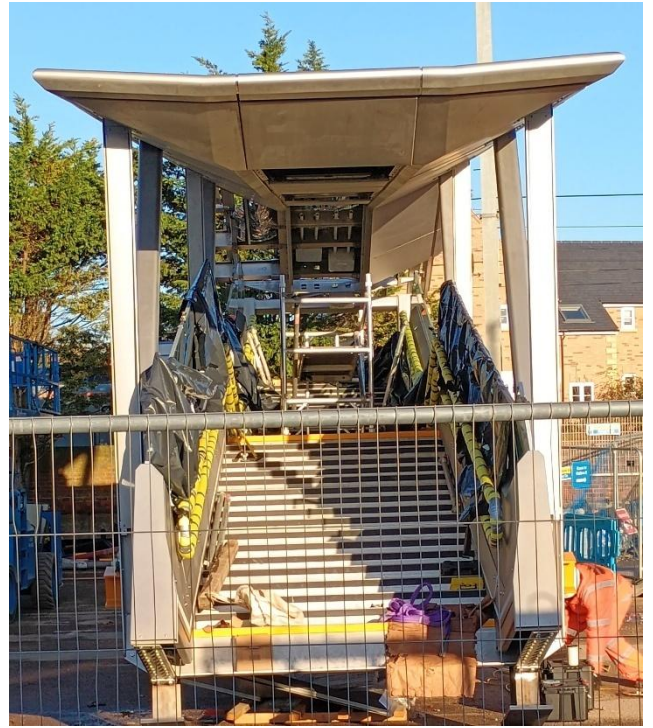
UP, UP and AWAY!

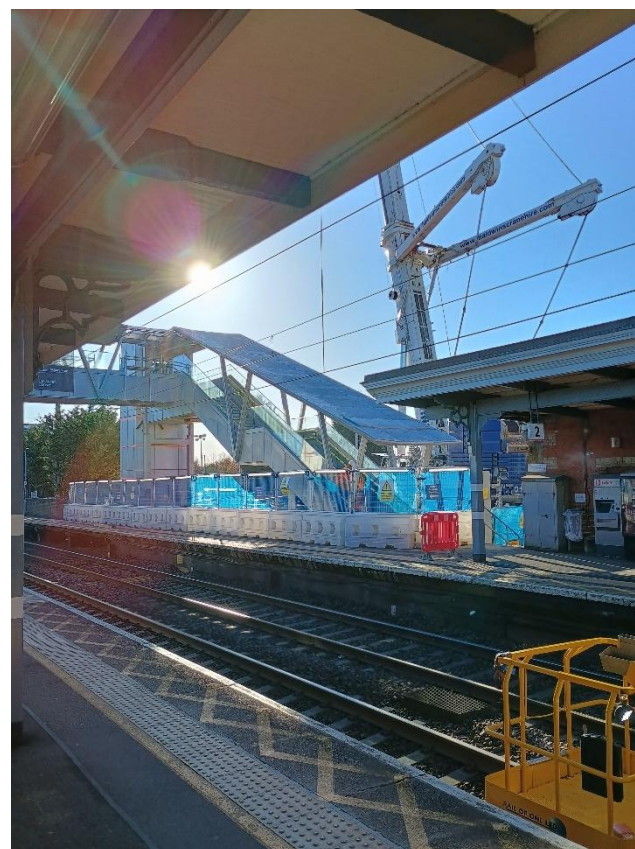
It's good to be able to report that the eagerly awaited new footbridge at Stowmarket has at last been erected. Over the weekend of 29/30 November several teams of engineers worked very efficiently to complete the task within the available time window. (Network Rail had a "possession" for the weekend, meaning rail replacement buses operated on all services from Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds, Norwich and Peterborough.) The much hyped bridge with its lightweight steel construction and modular composition – making it significantly easier to install because it arrives on site in readily transportable bits – is a first of its kind, and potentially a template for future use more widely on the railway network.

Of course, the principal reason for us to celebrate the new structure is the step change (pardon the pun) it represents in terms of Access for All. Alongside the new stairs the installation will include passenger lifts, so travel suddenly becomes much easier for anyone using the Ipswich bound platform who finds stairs either impossible or a real challenge. Installation dates for the lifts are still to be confirmed, but we hope as soon as possible. Greater Anglia's announcements so far indicate the new bridge will be open for use from early in January 2026. Another reason for hoping this schedule holds is that the new bridge also incorporates a roof, so the days of trudging across the line in the rain will soon be over. As of course will the assault course/workout presented by the wretched temporary structure Network Rail installed

nearly a year ago. Few if any will mourn its disappearance!

The photos show firstly three images of the new bridge ready for erection in the station car park (taken 26 November 2025) followed by four images taken 30 November, when a giant crane had been assembled and the bridge put into position. In the image taken from platform 2 you can see three bridges over the railway; the new structure, the temporary footbridge and beyond that Navigation Approach, the road bridge opened in 2010 as a means of bypassing the congestion caused by increasing traffic volumes at the B1115 station level crossing.





SOME RECENT RAIL DEVELOPMENTS

MARPA has been keeping its ear to the ground in terms of meetings and events. Here are the headlines from recent activity. A separate item below deals with the big

'Future of Rail' conference held in Colchester in November.

In September Transport East hosted a conference in Newmarket attended by Ross Taylor and Peter Wakefield which looked in some detail at the 'eastern arm' of the East West Rail project, the routes heading east from Cambridge towards Ipswich and Norwich. The engineering consultancy ARUP had been commissioned to evaluate the significance of this Eastern section and identify aspects of the rail service that would need to be upgraded with the coming of EWR. The logistical issue is easily summarised: what is the point of having up to five trains an hour from Oxford to Cambridge if service provision on eastwards is limited to a single train each hour?

To address this issue of capacity, one clear and urgent requirement is to restore the double track between Cambridge and Newmarket. You can read the informative and accessible consultancy report at [uk/wp-content/uploads/East-West-Rail-EasternSection](https://www.ukwp-content/uploads/East-West-Rail-EasternSection).

And at the end of November, Ross and the two Peters - Feeney & Wakefield - had a very positive meeting with Cliff Waterman, leader of West Suffolk District Council. They shared MARPA's key areas for improvement, notably more frequent services, eliminating the use of 3 car units on peak hour trains, restoring passenger facilities on the westbound platform at Bury and working with partner organisations to make a success of our new CRP. They also discussed the benefits of better way marking between Bury town centre and the station.

The Future of Rail in the East

On Thursday 20 November, Transport East (TE) hosted a conference in Colchester's Moot Hall to explore how the region's rail network can support economic growth, connect communities, and inform the ambitions of incoming mayors for Norfolk, Suffolk, and Greater Essex. Delegates discussed the implications of rail returning to public ownership alongside priorities such as integration with other transport modes and service improvements. Insights will be

shared with the new mayors to help shape their agendas from day one.

MARPA and Railfuture East Anglia delegates contributed to afternoon workshops, though it remains unclear how effectively these discussions will be collated into actionable advice. The morning presentations covered five themes: TE's 'Future of Rail', Anglia Integrated Railway, East West Rail integration, Beaulieu Park Station, and Essex Community Rail Partnership. Whilst informative, TE's vision felt limited, with only brief mention of a second stopping train between Clacton and Colchester. Questions about Stansted Airport's growing demand and a potential Cambridge-Braintree rail link were met with outdated references to bus shuttles, leaving many disappointed.

More positively, Jamie Burles outlined the benefits of integrating Greater Anglia, c2c and Network Rail Anglia, highlighting opportunities for spatial planning with devolved authorities.

Suzanne Winkels stressed the importance of properly embedding East West Rail into communities, though her time was curtailed. Gary MacDonnell described the persistence needed to deliver Beaulieu Park Station after 15 years of effort, while Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership showcased inspiring local initiatives across branch lines.

The day concluded with Colchester MP Pam Cox calling for a fast rail link from East Essex via Stansted Airport to Cambridge, connecting with East West Rail. This proposal resonated strongly and could become a defining project for the new mayors.

Conclusion: the conference provided useful insights but lacked a clear, ambitious vision. The real test will be whether delegates' contributions and bold projects—such as a Braintree - Stansted-Cambridge link—are embraced by incoming mayors to deliver the transformative rail future the region urgently needs.

Peter Wakefield

INSPIRATION RETURNS!



It's been confirmed that the Inspiration Train, a mobile exhibition displaying the railway past, present & future, with lots of fascinating information and interactive exhibits, is coming back to the east. We included an item in the last Newsletter about its stops at Norwich and Lowestoft in August 2025. Well, by popular demand it is heading east again at the start of 2026, with a berth on platform 3 at Cambridge station on Saturday 31 January and Sunday 1 February. Visits are free, but need to be pre-booked. The link below takes you the relevant section of the Rail 200 website.

<https://railway200.co.uk/location/cambridge-station/>

A DATE FOR THE DIARY

The MARPA AGM will take place on Saturday 21 March 2026 at 2 p.m. in the Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, Bury St Edmunds. Speakers are still to be confirmed, but we hope to have representatives from the new Mid Anglia Community Rail Partnership and Greater Anglia. With the train operator just returned to public ownership and East West Rail plans for the east now taking firm shape, the meeting will be a great opportunity for members to meet up, hear about current developments and share ideas about future improvements for our route and its services. There will be free refreshments available.

Our next Newsletter is due to be published in February 2026

CLASS 99 IS COMING TO OUR ROUTE!

You cannot travel on our route without being aware of the heavy rail freight traffic into and out of Felixstowe port. The freight company GBRf is investing in 30 new hybrid locomotives to continue to grow their business. The word 'hybrid' means that whilst they produce nearly 8,000 horsepower on electric power, they can work on a 2,400hp diesel engine too. This gives them flexibility to work across country from Stowmarket to Peterborough on the non-electrified route, then change to more environmentally friendly electric traction to go north to GBRf customers.

These locomotives will enter service early in the New Year after extensive testing. They are manufactured by Stadler who made the passenger trains that we travel on.

Testing over the MARPA route happened in August over two nights where test trains ran from Peterborough across country to Ipswich and then down the main line towards London. Sadly the 11pm time through Elmswell meant that your Editor did not get to see them, and their return time of around 5am was in near darkness too! The photograph below was taken at 'The Greatest Gathering' in Derby by Ashley Roots, and I thank him for allowing me to use his photograph.



They are certainly imposing looking locomotives, and I look forward to seeing