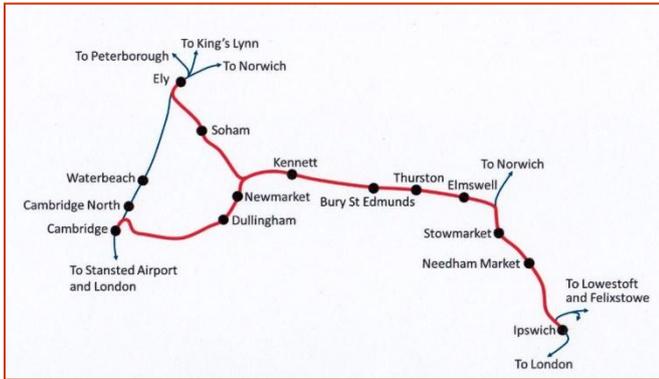


MARPA Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association



NEWSLETTER Spring 2026

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WELCOME

Welcome to this Spring edition of the MARPA newsletter. I use the word Spring carefully, as hopefully by the time you read this there will be some springlike weather for the new season. In this edition we welcome the new Community Rail Partnership Officer and as a first for MARPA news we have a QR code for you to scan to take part in the competition to find a name for our line to be used in publicity.



THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

It doesn't happen too often that we can look back over the course of the last three months or so and think that some genuine progress has been made. However, this time I really think that we can!

We have been in discussion with Greater Anglia (GA) on many issues, and we have definitely moved forward on some. For some 'live' news on current discussions, please look at the article on our recent GA liaison meeting in Newmarket.

You will be aware that we have been keeping the pressure on GA in respect of train formations on the two peak trains into and out of Cambridge in the morning and evening. Still too often four car trains are substituted with three car variants causing overcrowding and anxiety. We were pleased therefore when GA announced that it planned to provide an additional service each way in the peaks from May. This is great news and we applaud GA for this, although we must see four car trains on all services. We were also delighted to hear that at Stowmarket all Great Eastern mainline trains will call, instead of some passing without stopping. This is another issue that we have been discussing with GA.

The ticket office/staffing situation at Bury over the course of the last few years has been a cause of concern for us, and I write separately about this, so it was good news to hear that staffing at the station is to be substantially increased. In fact, the new staff members are already in post, and the hours of attendance have been extended. Please see the image below of the notice on the waiting room and toilets advertising the later opening hours.



This is all good news, but there is still so much more to do. All trains stopping at Kennett, proper waiting facilities on the Cambridge bound platform at Bury, better waiting and cycle facilities at some of our local village stations are a few more asks on our 'wish list'. So too is the need for additional trains generally, especially to address the substantial increase in passenger numbers along our line. We will keep the pressure on so that 'good news' editions like this are not so few and far between in the future. I hope to see you at the next AGM on Saturday 21st March where we will be able to discuss recent progress alongside the scope for more improvements on our route. Until next time.

Ross

ENGAGING WITH THE TRAIN OPERATOR - NOTES FROM FEBRUARY 2026 LIAISON MEETING

MARPA met with Alan Neville (AN) from Greater Anglia (GA) in Newmarket on 25th February 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. Chief amongst future developments were the timetable improvements scheduled from May. He also noted large visitor numbers associated with the recent return of the Rail 200 Inspiration Train to several East Anglian stations, including Cambridge. He drew attention to the very significant rise in requests for Passenger Assist across the GA network, now approximately ten thousand per month. Specific issues raised in discussion are as follows.

- **Short formation trains on peak services**

The context is that, with the exception of a ten day period in January, 3 car trains continue on a weekly basis to be rostered for peak time services. AN agreed to pursue and circulate to MARPA relevant GA data about short formations during peak hours. He also pointed out that a fleet manager will be present at the annual stakeholder meeting in April, so further discussion of the range of factors involved will be possible then, alongside potential solutions to the problem. Action: performance data from AN.

- **Kennett stops**

In summary: GA's current view is that whilst all westbound services can stop at Kennett without causing any serious scheduling issues, the position eastbound is more complicated. He conceded that the introduction of a half hourly stopping pattern on mainline services at Stowmarket from May 2026 could help in enabling more Mid Anglia services to include a Kennett stop, but more work from timetablers was required. Action: to be picked up at the meeting with GA/NR 4 March.

- **Bury westbound waiting room**

AN confirmed that there was no funding set aside in the current GA Delivery Plan for

works linked to this much needed facility. However he stated that GA colleagues were exploring the scope for third party funding to help make this scheme more feasible. MARPA reminded him of our very constructive meeting with the leader of West Suffolk Council towards the end of 2025. Action: MARPA to pass on WSC contact details.

- **Cambridge platform congestion**

Whilst we all agreed that some of the overcrowding issues now endemic at the station would be eased in the longer term by the much needed eastern entrance and second footbridge over the platforms, MARPA believes that more timely improvements could be achieved through intelligent platform utilisation, especially in peaks. AN acknowledged that closer liaison between Network Rail and GA Cambridge station management might help provide some improvements - especially perhaps at platform 4. Action: to be picked up at the meeting with GA/NR 4 March.

- **Stowmarket connections**

This concerns the ongoing issue of a tight connection time from Mid Anglia services to northbound mainline services (Diss & Norwich). The much awaited entry into service of the new footbridge will provide some relief, but it is clear it cannot solve the problem altogether if a Mid Anglia service is running late. (AN was unable to provide an update re the completion of work; the most recent information from GA suggested mid-2026.) Whilst there will be some mitigation provided by the new half hourly mainline service stops at Stowmarket, the situation for travellers overall would be eased if an additional minute could be factored into the connection time. It was acknowledged that pathing and other issues presented some challenges. Action: to be picked up at the meeting with GA/NR 4 March.

- **Cycles - at stations & on trains**

The first point relates to the sheer variability of provision at stations along the route in terms both of quantity & quality. Action: AN to alert his colleague Scott Dolling, whose

brief includes issues related to active travel and processes aimed at integrated travel experience. The second point is about enforcing the current morning peak hours ban on non-folding bikes on Cambridge bound services. The meeting recognised that this was a sensitive area, where the existing clear policy could not invariably be enforced. It was also accepted that the matter was aggravated where services were operated by short formation units with resulting overcrowding.

TICKETS, TICKETING & STAFFING AT BURY ST EDMUNDS

Members may recall that MARPA has been in discussion with Greater Anglia (GA) directly and indirectly about this subject ever since the Ticket Office at Bury closed in July 2022. We were concerned that there had been no public consultation over the closure, as was required, and as a result, customers could not obtain the full range of tickets and advice that was offered at all other stations with a staffed ticket office. In fact, as the member of staff who worked at the station was now required to oversee the newly installed ticket gates, there was less time to generally help customers. Despite much toing and froing of letters and emails with GA about our concerns, no progress was being made. As a result, in July last year, we made a formal complaint to the national passenger watchdog Transport Focus (TF).

The specific elements of our complaint were;

- The Ticket Office was closed without prior consultation against laid down regulations.
- The full range of tickets were then not available, or not being provided, to customers notwithstanding that a ticket machine had been retained.
- Some GA staff were not being trained on the full range of tickets etc.

- The GA staff were required to oversee the ticket gates and had little time to help customers.
- There were insufficient staff to adequately cover all required duties.

Sadly, TF found that the extraction of information out of GA proved very tedious too so that progress in addressing our complaint was particularly slow. However, we are now pleased to report that, having completed its investigation, TF agrees with us that full consultation should have taken place BEFORE any changes were made. However, we accept that a physical ticket office is not likely to return anytime soon so we were keen to make progress on the other areas of concern. We are also pleased that GA has now announced that it is to;

- Train all staff at Bury to use the existing ticket machine for the full range of ticketing
- Significantly increase the permanent GA staffing so there is sufficient capacity to assist all customers AND to extend the hours that staff are in attendance.

This latter point is important especially with the increase in passenger numbers at the station approaching one million, almost the same as Stowmarket which retains its ticket office.

Progress has been made and this is all most welcome, but rest assured that we will continue to monitor matters closely.

Ross Taylor

A NEW FREIGHT OPERATOR ON OUR ROUTE

To be correct not strictly one new freight operator but two. The recent split of Freightliner into two companies has created the new identity 'Heavy Haul Rail' from the old Freightliner Heavyhaul. They must lose the Freightliner identity over the next few months. Freightliner intermodal (the bit that hauls the containers to and from Felixstowe port) remains branded as 'Freightliner' and has been sold to French intermodal Haulier CMA CGM.



70002 is still branded as 'Freightliner', but this is a Heavy Haul Rail operated service photographed at Elmswell is carrying about 2,000 tonnes of stone from Tunstead in the Peak District to Ipswich Griffin Wharf. The stone is for use in the construction of Sizewell C.

LATEST FIGURES SHOW PASSENGER NUMBERS CONTINUE TO RISE

The annual statistics ("estimates of station usage") produced by the Office of Rail and Road, covering the twelve month period April 2024 - March 2025, were published at the beginning of December 2025. For the Mid Anglia route the story they tell is the now familiar one of continuing growth in passenger numbers. Looking at the footfall

figures for all the intermediate stations on our line – i.e. leaving out Cambridge & Ipswich, where the figures for specific routes cannot be disaggregated – the average increase in passenger footfall over 5 years is nearly 26%, whilst the average since 2023/24 is over 11%. Looking at individual stations, the big headline is that at both Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket annual footfall is now getting close to one million. Equally striking are the five year growth figures at Elmswell and Thurston – at both stations, an increase of over 70% - a direct consequence of the extensive house building that has taken place in these Mid Suffolk villages and surrounding communities such as Woolpit. Similarly, the 15% expansion since 2023/24 at Needham Market reflects ongoing residential development there and the consequent growth in demand for work, study and leisure travel.

One station where the footfall data challenges this upward trend is Soham. Passenger numbers in 2024/25, the second full year of operations since the re-opening of the station in March 2022, look to have flatlined at around 65,000. An obvious conclusion is that demand is constrained by the current two hourly service – itself helping make the case for an hourly passenger service.

If you are interested in looking more widely at footfall figures for all stations in the region, the relevant data with commentary by our own Peter Wakefield is published in the current issue of RAIL EAST, the quarterly newsletter of Railfuture East Anglia. See pp.11-13 at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/rail-east/RailEast-Issue-209-February-2026.pdf>



The Mid Anglia figures help support a robust business case – long championed by MARPA – for enhancements to both services and facilities. When we advocate for more frequent services and improved station facilities, such as the need for a waiting room and toilets on the westbound platform at Bury, it is against a consistent background of growing passenger demand. As noted in our Chair's Thoughts at the start of this newsletter, credit to Greater Anglia on the service side for additional peak time trains from May 2026, but now is surely the time for some serious thinking about developing service patterns to address demand from communities along the route. This will entail looking afresh at arcane issues such as sectional running times – on the basis that higher permitted speeds mean faster journeys and faster journeys mean more services operating in a given timeframe. With the coming together of track and train under the new organisation Anglia Railway the opportunity now exists for a more holistic review of operations. MARPA hopes that opportunity is seized, to the benefit of all using the train service.

STRESS AT STOWMARKET – THE CASE FOR IMPROVED CONNECTIONS

About three or four years ago my office moved from rural Norfolk into the centre of Norwich. Great, I thought – I can stop driving and catch the train. A relaxed start to the day, nice and predictable, no traffic to bother me.

I began by catching the first off-peak train from Stowmarket, but soon discovered that there was a handy connection at both ends of the day between my nearest station of Elmswell and the Stowmarket-Norwich train. The connection home in the evening was tight – only about six minutes, not long to get along the platform and over the bridge –

but this was almost always enough, and they'd hold the Elmswell train if the southbound mainline train was a few minutes late.

Since the timetable changes in January of this year, though, it's been a different story. Now the tight connection has shifted to the morning, not the evening. There are only *five* minutes scheduled between the trains, and if the Elmswell train is a minute or two late, then that's tough – the mainline train can't wait. Even if our train was on time, it would be a frantic scramble over the temporary bridge, and a stressful start to the day. And so far this year, the Elmswell train has been a minute or two late every single time I've had to go into the office. The sweaty panic amongst us commuters has been unpleasant for everyone involved.

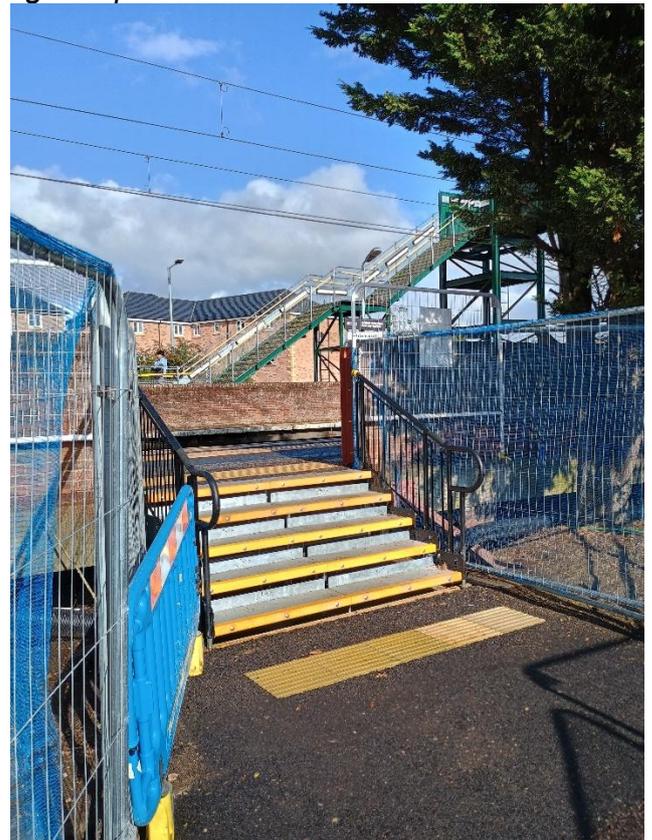
So, I've decided that I'll have to drive to the station at Stowmarket again; I just can't trust the advertised connection. I've talked to other passengers and they tell the same story. Some stay on the Elmswell train and change at Ipswich instead, using the next train north (which currently heads direct for Norwich and doesn't stop at Stowmarket). We all hate the worry and uncertainty.

Will this all be sorted out once the new bridge and lifts are open? Maybe; it's closer to the platforms, which might shave off half a minute for the 'active travellers' keeping fit on the stairs. But it will still be difficult for those with disabilities, luggage, bicycles or pushchairs, and the anxiety about the lift arriving will add an extra layer of stress.

All we need is a few minutes more for the connection in the mornings – like we used to have before the recent changes. It would mean a lot to those who have no option but to take the train. And who knows, maybe more of us would be confident enough to use our local connections from Bury, Thurston and Elmswell once more.

Helen Geake

These photographs show the constrained access to the platform and bridge – very tight at peak times.



(Editor: please see comment regarding connections at Stowmarket to & from

Norwich elsewhere in this issue. Helen is expressing a widely shared concern in her article and MARPA will continue to seek service improvements from Greater Anglia. Connections at Stowmarket from Mid Anglia services are identified in the GA timetable. Our view is that GA needs to work harder to ensure these published connections consistently work in practice.)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

MARPA AGM – Saturday 21st March 2026

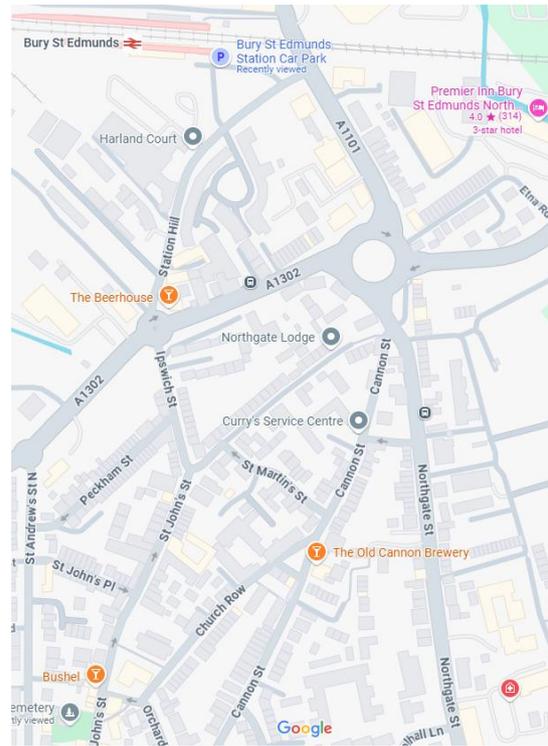
Our annual meeting this year will take place at The Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1SJ starting at 14.00. Please see map for location.

This year our speaker will be Lesley Rayner, the recently appointed Community Rail Partnership Officer for our route.

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. The map shows the safest route from the station, taking around 15/20 minutes via Station Hill, left to Tayfen Rd pedestrian crossing, St Andrews Street North, left onto St John's Place & then right into St John's St. The Friends Meeting House is located just past the Bushell pub.



SUPPORT FOR PASSENGER INTERESTS FROM OUR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Now that railway operators are becoming nationalised (the Bill for Great British Railways is currently going through Parliament), the role of Members of Parliament in representing passenger interests within their constituencies becomes ever more significant. From previous MARPA Newsletters readers will know of our long-standing desire to see an hourly service throughout the day at Kennett. In addition, we have seen the growth of overcrowding on peak trains, exacerbated by the failure of Greater Anglia (GA) to provide 4 car units at the busiest times. Three car trains are just not enough to provide a comfortable service, especially with the added complication of full-size bicycles and passengers in close proximity in vestibules which can present safety issues.

Although Kennett Station is just over the Cambridgeshire border, the majority of

passengers are from West Suffolk. The local MP, Nick Timothy, met local residents and MARPA in March of last year, as we reported at the time. He wrote on their behalf to GA taking up their concerns. A meeting took place with Martin Beable, the Managing Director at GA and his Head of Corporate Affairs on 7 January 2026. Nick expressed the concern of residents about the issues at Kennett, short trains and overcrowding.

GA has acknowledged that there is room in the timetable to accommodate stops for all trains *westbound* but does not wish to offer that while there are still problems with short transfer times *eastbound* at Stowmarket. It also attributes the short trains to “service disruption or train faults”. MARPA’s monitoring indicates that the issue is occurring much more frequently than this would suggest. GA has said that it would engage with British Transport Police to provide “active patrols to stop and educate passengers who are boarding with (non folding) full size bicycles at peak times, providing enforcement”, and in addition, “our own staff, at stations or on board would continue to monitor and challenge passengers where appropriate, and remain alert”.

Nick Timothy has indicated that he will continue to press for further action, particularly for GA to engage with Network Rail to assess the potential increase in line speed on the route and hence free up the timetable. This action was previously agreed by GA’s former Managing Director in 2019, but there has been no evidence offered so far of progress. This specific issue is one that MARPA itself is also raising directly with Network Rail. We will report back in the next issue of the Newsletter.

On a positive note, Nick Timothy welcomed the subsequent announcement of two extra peak hour trains from May 2026, referred to elsewhere in this Newsletter. Following a further meeting with GA, this time at the House of Commons, he asked a question in Parliament. He stressed the need for doubling the single line between Cambridge and Newmarket and secured a meeting with Heidi Alexander, the Secretary of State. He also highlighted the need for the major improvements required at Ely and Haughley – still to be included in any budgeted Network Rail programme. An article summarising Nick Timothy’s ongoing work appeared in a recent issue of the Newmarket Flyer – and singled out MARPA for mention.



From left, Nick Timothy MP, Jonathan Denby & Martin Beable.

Nick is not the only local MP raising rail concerns on behalf of their constituents and the wider East Anglia region. Charlotte Cane, the MP for neighbouring Ely and East Cambridgeshire that includes the eastern end of our line, recently met Lord Hendy, the Rail Minister, to discuss the much-needed Ely scheme. Charlotte hosted a debate in December in Parliament to highlight this crucial project that will benefit both passenger and freight services. MARPA hopes to hear of other local MPs involved with our line who are taking up rail issues!

John Ford

INTRODUCING THE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP OFFICER



Hello. My name is Lesley Rayner and I am the Community Rail Partnership Officer for the new CRP for Greater Anglia's Mid Anglia route between Ipswich and Cambridge. I know this partnership and my role have been some time in coming so I'm delighted to be able to introduce myself at last.

I'm pleased to say that our application to join the Community Rail Network was accepted early in January 2026 and we can now move forward with agreeing a name for the CRP, designing a logo and then really starting to work with the communities along the line.

You will probably be aware that we've been asking all interested parties to help us choose the name for the CRP, something that captures the essence of the area. I'm also planning a meeting to launch the new Community Rail Partnership and to gain as broad a view as possible of how communities along the line would like to work with the CRP. MARPA will, of course, be invited. This is expected to take place at the end of March and further details will be shared when available. ***(Editor's comment – please scan the the QR code below)***



After a very positive introductory chat with MARPA chair Ross and secretary Peter Feeny towards the end of January, I'm honoured to have been invited to attend your AGM in March. I'm really looking forward to sharing a few initial ideas on what the CRP could focus on and how the CRP and MARPA could work together. Most of all, though, I'm keen to meet you and to hear your thoughts.

I hope to see you on 21st March.

Lesley

EXPANSION OF THE DISABLED RAILCARD ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

On 5th November, it was announced by Government that from 1st March 2026, eligibility criteria for the Disabled Persons Railcard will expand to include a wider range of disabilities.

The types of evidence required to support applications will also be updated. This means that more people will be eligible to apply for a Disabled Persons Railcard and begin saving 1/3 on their train journeys across Great Britain.

The eligibility criteria expansion is happening in 2 phases, to include the following:

Phase 1, launching 1st March 2026, will extend eligibility to those who:

- Receive a Disabled Persons Bus Pass in England, Scotland or Wales
- Receive a London Disabled Persons Freedom Pass
- Have a Blue Badge
- Are currently unable to drive on medical grounds
- Receive Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) benefits
- Receive Industrial Injuries Benefit for 20% degree of disablement or higher
- Are without speech

These individuals should all possess documentation that evidences that they meet the threshold for eligibility and will be integrated into the existing Disabled Persons Railcard application process from March 2026.

Phase 2, launching September 2026, will further extend eligibility to disabilities and conditions that require professional health evidence and more detailed assessment, including some long-term or degenerative medical conditions, and neurodiversity where it has a substantial impact on a person's ability to travel by train.

More detailed evidentiary requirements will be made available for this phase closer to implementation in September 2026.

The above is taken from [Eligibility Expansion - Disabled Persons Railcard](#) where further information will be added in due course.

GA quick to respond to a road closure.

GA providing helpful information on the ground: the rail replacement service operating on Sunday 22 February was unable to access the usual stopping points in Elmswell - this notice at the station enabled travellers to find out where buses were actually stopping. Good work from GA, and a reminder that engineering work doesn't only affect the railway!

The rail replacement bus stop has moved. Sunday 22 February 2026.

Due to road closures, the rail replacement bus stop will be moved on Sunday 22 February. It will now be at Cooks Road bus stop, by Elmswell Library, approximately a 6-minute walk from Elmswell station, as shown on the walking route. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

