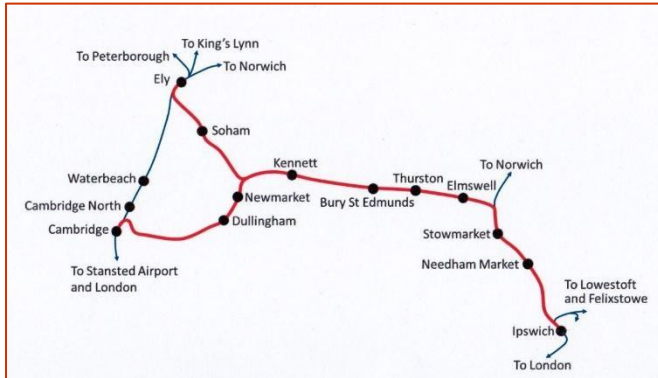




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NEWSLETTER Summer 2026

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Marpa summer newsletter. It is still a time of positive train news for our railway with the Community Rail Partnership beginning work, more peak hour trains - and a new station, just off our 'patch' but potentially of great value to Marpa route passengers.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR



When I sat down to think about the progress, or not, since the last newsletter, I decided to read through my 'thoughts' from our last (Spring) edition. It was indeed an issue with plenty of positive news. Pleasingly, many of the events and improvements have now moved from 'news' to 'reality', and we are already seeing the benefits.

Peter Feeney writes about the official launch of the St Edmund's Community Rail Partnership (CRP) which took place in

Thurston in March. I was there with MARPA colleagues Peter, Peter Wakefield, and Ben Walsh, and, as described, it was a very positive event. It was so pleasing to see the CRP officially 'born' after such a long gestation! We are working closely with Lesley Rayner, the CRP Partnership Officer and we have had several positive meetings with her already. We are also delighted that Lesley has agreed to write a regular piece for this newsletter.

Elsewhere, the two new services into and out of Cambridge, in the morning and evening peaks, are working very well and is having a very positive effect on the overcrowding issues that hitherto were a real problem. We are also enjoying the re-introduced half-hourly service from Stowmarket, which is the usual connection station off our line, to both Norwich and London.

Again, there has been some real progress made and we are grateful to Greater Anglia (GA) for their collaboration in these.

However, we still have a list of issues that we really want to see some action on, and many of these were discussed in a recent telephone conversation that Peter Feeney had with Alan Neville from GA. Peter reports on this call later.

I attended the annual Stakeholder meeting, that GA hosts, in London in April and was able to ask questions of GA and Network

Rail (NR). I did ask NR about what opportunities we could explore to increase the speed limit on our very busy line and so improve the service. Sadly, the response was extremely negative and quite disheartening. However, conversations following this meeting have been more encouraging.

Liz McGregor reports on the latest situation at Thurston in respect of the work to remove the dangerous 'barrow' crossing, and we have the latest information from the consultations and decisions made in respect of the East West Railway (EWR) that could be so beneficial to our line.

Slightly later than expected, we saw the opening of the brand-new station at Cambridge South on 28th June. The 'official' opening, to which MARPA was invited, was postponed, but Peter Feeney visited the new station on 29th anyway and herein includes a brief report with images.

All in all, we have a really varied edition, and I hope that you enjoy reading it.

Finally, I just wanted to say how upset we were to hear of the train crash, very recently, near to Bedford and we were so sorry that a driver died in the incident. No one should go off to work and never come home. You may know that I worked on the railway for over eleven years, and it is one big family, and heartbreaking when we lose one of our own. We are thinking of the driver's family at this time and hope that all of those injured will soon recover.

Until next time.

Ross

ENGAGING WITH GREATER ANGLIA - NOTES FROM DISCUSSION WITH ALAN NEVILLE 09/06/26

We were unable to organise a face to face meeting on this occasion. What follows is a short summary of a phone discussion between Alan Neville and MARPA secretary Peter Feeney.

- *When will the **Stowmarket** lifts be operational?*
- ***Stowmarket station access improvements** - ongoing concerns as previously raised by Cllr Keith Welham et al.*

Lifts are still expected to be in public use at some point in the summer. Pre-operational testing continues. Regarding the issue of better station access for pedestrians, GA is aware of improvements already suggested and it is likely plans will be shared with local stakeholders in due course.

- ***Bury platform 1 passenger facilities***

There is likely to be some positive news on the waiting room issue in the near future.

- ***Any movement on Network Rail (NR) Thurston feasibility study?***

The expectation is still that the study will be available in the very near future. See further the article in this issue by Liz McGregor of CATS.

- ***Scope for more car parking at***

Kennett using available NR land?

Under Great British Railways it is inevitable that the current "ownership" issues between land/property leased by the train operator and the assets owned by the body responsible for rail infrastructure will disappear. This should mean that conversations about the use of land owned by the latter for the benefit of customers travelling with the former should become more straightforward. It was acknowledged that with the amount of house building underway around the station some expansion of car parking would make sense.

- ***Cycles & peak services - monitoring of regulation (BTP involvement etc)?***

Nothing resolved here: monitoring of bikes on "banned" peak services was basically up to the conductor on each service. There was no file of complaints available at Cambridge station, so the GA line appears to be - unless people formally complain there is no problem.

- ***Use of multiple 755s on intercity services - why & is this likely to be long term?***

The why is simple - unavailability of 12 car 745 units for intercity work for a range of reasons. However, less use of bi-modes in multiple appears to be occurring, which means more 4 car units should be available for their core function on the rural routes - which should in turn mean fewer complaints about 3 car units on already very busy peak services. Since the start of the summer timetable it seems that the bulk of peak services - now six per day in total - are being operated by 4 car units.

- *Will GA be working with the St Edmund's CRP on plans to commemorate the 180th anniversary of the Ipswich - Bury line opening? (MARPA is keen to be involved as appropriate.)*

The response was yes - at a time when significant anniversaries seem to be cropping up regularly, the opportunity for the CRP to mark this event in December 2026 will be taken up.

- *Future timetable amendments - the case for an earlier arrival in Ipswich (additional M-F eastbound service arriving no later than 0830 to serve work and college markets)?*

The start of a longer conversation - the idea has been forwarded to timetablers in order to see what practical scope for such a service might exist in any future timetable revision.

ST EDMUND RETURNS - LAUNCH OF THE LATEST COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Greater Anglia's latest Community Rail Partnership - its tenth - was formally launched at an event held at New Green Community Centre in Thurston near Bury St Edmunds on 31st March 2026. This was a significant event for MARPA, given our long term lobbying in pursuit of a community partnership for our route.

Attendees were informed that, following a competition attracting around a thousand entries, the official name of the new organisation is to be the **St Edmund's CRP** - Edmund, ninth century king of the Angles, antagonist of the marauding Vikings and later revered in the Middle Ages as a Christian martyr.

The launch event formed the inaugural meeting of the stakeholder group drawn together to help the CRP develop local links and propose projects for the future. Representatives of a range of community and voluntary groups, as well as elected members and officers from the councils helping to fund the CRP attended. Alongside MARPA, Railfuture East Anglia was represented, together with a number of station adopters from across the route.

Tracey Harding, chair of the CRP steering group and CEO of the tourism promotion organisation Discover Newmarket, welcomed everyone to the event. Jonathan Denby from Greater Anglia outlined GA's long term commitment to the CRP concept and emphasised how the St Edmund's CRP would be building on strong foundations, including an enthusiastic team of adopters serving stations within the new partnership. The input from the Community Rail Network was from its regional support officer, Colin Burcombe, who stressed the huge variety of projects the new CRP had the potential to exploit in bringing the railway and its communities together. His presentation highlighted the significant social value a CRP could bring to those communities. Lesley Rayner, project officer for the St Edmund's CRP, then summarised work to date and next steps, including further contact with relevant organisations and the development of a logo, website and social media presence.



Committee member Ben Walsh deep in conversation at the opening – note the MARPA pennant.

In a wide ranging discussion session that ended the formal part of the launch, there were questions about how the CRP would make itself known along the route beyond the organisations comprising the stakeholder group. Profile raising, both directly and through the stakeholder network, was recognised as the key early priority as a work plan for the CRP was developed.

Early signs suggest the arrival of the St Edmund's CRP is widely welcomed - a promising sign for future partnership working with communities along the line.

A version of this article first appeared in RAIL EAST issue 210.

Peter Feeney

A NEW FREIGHT OPERATOR ON OUR ROUTE - UPDATE

In the Spring newsletter the editor noted the arrival of 'Heavy Haul Rail' as new but not so new train operator. As expected the company has a new livery and branding which is certainly different.



ANOTHER LINK IN THE CHAIN: EAST WEST RAIL FINAL OFFICIAL PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The latest step in the lengthy journey towards the realisation of East West Rail is the final public consultation on a number of key infrastructure questions that has just been completed (June 2026).

MARPA members will appreciate the significance of this project for our route: whilst the scheme focusses on building a railway between Oxford and Cambridge, its connectivity to the existing network at many points along the route is what will give it such substantial added economic and social value. Put simply, the prospect of a direct fast passenger service along the Mid Anglia route westwards beyond Cambridge to Bedford, Milton Keynes and Oxford - with connections beyond to the west of England and South Wales.

The MARPA response to this final round of consultation, informed by the response compiled by Railfuture (grateful thanks to our committee member and Railfuture East Anglia vice chair Peter Wakefield), is generally supportive of the latest proposals advanced by the EWR company. In terms of our local service, it is especially good to see a firm commitment to building an eastern entrance at Cambridge - in terms of passenger volumes using the station, this is already long overdue. The decision to expedite this scheme, so it actually happens relatively soon in the construction process, is particularly welcome. So, overall, approval for what EWR aims to achieve. But like Railfuture we have significant concerns about a small group of issues:

- The continuing advocacy of "discontinuous electrification", so over approximately half of the route trains will be reliant on battery power - a seriously false economy which is certain to limit future capacity.
- The proposed location of a new "Cambridge East" station - like Railfuture we feel the most appropriate location is in Cherry Hinton, somewhat further east than the site proposed. It's hard to avoid the suspicion that land developers and their planning agents have proved persuasive here.
- The need to extend a two track electrified line east to Newmarket - this would transform connectivity at Newmarket, enabling substantial modal shift as more journeys to and from Cambridge were undertaken by rail (the Ely scenario).
- The case for a "St Neots East" station - the EWR scheme as proposed will see services skirt the eastern edge of a rapidly growing town without stopping! Slim chance of meaningful modal shift happening in that location.

Our hope, alongside other campaigners, is that due attention will be paid to such reasonable and well evidenced concerns.

That said, like everyone supportive of the project, we are desperate to see all the necessary planning hoops accomplished and a start made on constructing the central section - the new railway east from Bedford to Hauxton Junction via Tempsford and Camborne. Even with a fair wind, completion and services operating still seem a long way off...

The detailed Railfuture submission can be read at <https://share.google/Tfv0B1oVMGSFXvXVn>

CAMBRIDGE SOUTH STATION OPENS FOR BUSINESS

The long awaited station serving the ever-growing biomedical campus and Addenbrookes hospital complex on the southern edge of the city opened on Sunday 28th June. First impressions are very positive. Built with entrances leading via ticket gates directly to platforms 1 and 4, Cambridge South is fully accessible throughout, and has all the right environmental credentials: masses of covered cycle parking (with CCTV and the option of a secure locked compound), a wildflower seeded curving roof, rainwater retention and a handsome array of solar panels resulting in an exceptionally low carbon footprint. And with up to 20 trains an hour to and from Cambridge at peak times, alongside direct services to destinations such as London, Norwich, Birmingham, Stansted and Brighton, it is surely the case that Network Rail's calculation of annual footfall at just under two million will rapidly be exceeded (as has already proved the case at Cambridge North). The station design is spacious and airy, with wide stairways and sufficient canopy cover on each platform to provide adequate shelter for waiting passengers. On its east side, the front of the station is just metres away from Astra Zeneca's imposing Discovery Centre

and the adjacent Royal Papworth Hospital. Nearby bus stops with frequent services allow easy access to the wider Addenbrookes campus. By contrast, the western entrance is set on the edge of a wildflower meadow, part of Hobson's Park, with the village of Trumpington beyond.



Cambridge South seen from outside



The view from inside, a modern station as befits its location.



Plenty of cycle storage as befits a station in Cambridge!



The modern architecture is pleasing to the editor's eyes.

SCHEDULES UNRAVELLED: THREE BAD DAYS ON THE RAILS

It is nowadays easy to take for granted a generally reliable service on our route, with punctuality and reliability at levels previous generations of rail users might have envied. But in a world where we are never too far from accidents and incidents that can upend our plans, it would be naive to assume that any rail service can be immune from "events". Three recent cases on the Mid Anglia route certainly illustrate this.

The story begins on the morning of Tuesday 14th April with a freight service from Felixstowe which left the port on time around 0830, but subsequently developed engine problems, crawling through Elmswell station at about 5-6 mph an hour late. As an immediate result, the 0920 ex Ipswich service for Cambridge followed it into Elmswell approx 65 minutes late, only then to terminate at Bury. Given that this service spent over an hour mainly stationary between Stowmarket and Elmswell, it's fair to say that there must have been a good number of disgruntled travellers who learnt after all the delay that the train wasn't going on to Newmarket or Cambridge. The following Cambridge bound service from Ipswich was then cancelled, along with four other Mid Anglia route trains. In addition to these cancellations, other Mid Anglia services were further disrupted, including services to and from Peterborough. Overall, a seriously challenging morning on the railway. On the Greater Anglia website potential travellers were informed that "Due to the fault, the freight is running at an incredibly slow speed which means we are unable to run our services until the freight is clear of the line." Honest to a fault!

The good news? Passenger services were largely back on schedule by lunchtime, which reflects the efforts of operational staff at both GA and Network Rail to restore the timetable.

More recently, significant disruption was caused early on the evening of Tuesday 2nd June by an incident involving a pedestrian at Cherry Hinton level crossing. The circumstances remain unclear - no injuries appear to have been reported. What is however clear is the grave impact on rail operations, with a combination of severely delayed and cancelled services during the evening peak and beyond. At least two Cambridge-bound trains from Ipswich (the 1720 & 1820 departures) were stopped at Chippenham Junction and turned back east to retrace their journeys to Ipswich. Eastbound, after the much delayed 1648 from Cambridge (which finally arrived in Ipswich over two hours late), the next service to run was the 2048 - leaving a gap of four hours.

And even more recently, a points failure near Kennett on Monday 15th June meant that no services ran between Bury and Cambridge until 1000. An unrelated points failure at Ely caused further complications and delays for services from Peterborough to Ipswich. Westbound, the first train from Ipswich arrived in Cambridge at 1041. Eastbound, the 1048 departure from Cambridge (the same unit) was the first train for Ipswich.

Traction problems, infrastructure difficulties and the human element - the three incidents certainly illustrate the varied vulnerabilities of the railway. Doubtless both GA and Network Rail in reviewing the incidents will be establishing whether any wider lessons can be learnt.

If you or anyone you know was caught up in any of these disruptions, please let us know - contact secretary@marpa.org.uk. We are not aware of any bus replacement arrangements put in place on any of these days, so more information as to what travellers were told about alternative travel arrangements would be very helpful. Travellers have a reasonable expectation that the contract they enter into in purchasing a ticket will be honoured by the travel provider. How far train operators fulfil

that obligation is at least open to question. At least the Delay Repay facility means generally efficient reimbursement of some or all of the ticket cost - not that it allows compensation for the anxiety and serious inconvenience such incidents often entail.

THURSTON STATION CROSSING UPDATE



*Archive Photos:- The Station House and the Subway
from inside the Station House
With thanks from Railway Heritage Trust/Railway
Record of the British Isles*

Many of you will know that CATS (Community Action for Thurston Station) has been lobbying for over 6 years for the Thurston Station House to be used again after many years of standing empty. It is a Grade 2 listed building that is owned by Network Rail (NR) but is managed by Greater Anglia (GA). It is semi-derelict inside but it is structurally sound outside. GA advertise it for rent and there has been interest in the past but the cost of internal

renovations is too high for either commercial or community organisations.

GA has been keeping the grounds in a reasonable condition and CATS and our Parish Council (PC) contact them about any issues or problems that we observe.

It is too large and too costly for the PC to consider renovating and renting.

The station's footfall was over 100,000 last year and is rising but Thurston is still designated as a "Very Small" station and as such warrants only the most basic passenger facilities.

Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) has funded Network Rail (NR) to research two options for replacing the dangerous pedestrian (barrow) crossing over the tracks. The result of this work by NR is due for release this summer.

One option is to reopen the Victorian pedestrian subway which opens up inside the station house on the north side and on the land adjacent to Cracknells Garage on the south side.

This is the preferred option for MSDC, our PC, and CATS. We believe that there would be space within the building for both the stairs and lift required for such a project as well as for some community or small business use.

The other option is to install a pedestrian bridge and lift from the station car park over to the Cambridge platform. This would be very visible high up on the embankment, and some parking spaces would have to be sacrificed.

Both options would cost millions and would require third party funding. We believe that the subway option would attract some charitable heritage funding.

So CATS keeps on lobbying our politicians and the rail authorities about our station house, whilst we wait to see what might happen next to it!

Liz McGregor

NEWS FROM THE ST EDMUND'S LINE COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP



A lot has happened since the launch of the Community Rail Partnership at the end of March: we have a new logo (see above) and new promotional materials. All in time for Community Rail Week(s) at the beginning of June, during which I visited libraries up and down the line to promote the CRP and to talk to local people about how they use the railway, and if not, why not. As I write, a fledgling website is rapidly maturing, which will be able to showcase not only the work the CRP is doing, but also activities which are taking place at communities along the line. A poster for the line is also being designed.

The logo includes the crown and arrows which will be familiar to many from St. Edmund's story. What may be less well-known is the significance of the wolf. It is said that a wolf revealed the location of King Edmund's body to his followers. In addition to Community Rail Week, I've been meeting all kinds of groups and organisations to raise awareness of the CRP and to start to sow the seeds of working together, whether that's with local community groups, schools or organisations working with particular groups in our community.

Projects which are currently in development include artwork on the second footbridge at Ipswich station, a history board for Stowmarket station, work with Thurston Community College to introduce safe use of the railway to students, a bee hotel for Kennett station, an information board for Dullingham station and boards to celebrate

the 180th anniversary of the opening of the Ipswich to Bury St. Edmunds Line in 1846. I've also been asked to work on a refresh of MARPA's railway walks, which I'm delighted to do.

As you can see, these are exciting times!

Lesley Rayner

MIDLAND PULLMAN EXCURSION TRAIN

On July 1st a Chelmsford to Scarborough excursion stops at Bury St Edmunds to pick up passengers for a day trip in style to the Yorkshire coast.

Photo courtesy of Geoff Tibble

