

Marpa

Mid Anglia Rail Passengers' Association
www.marpa.org.uk

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Summer 2009 Newsletter

Welcome to the Summer 2009 MARPA Newsletter. Although the promised 'Barbeque' Summer heralded by the Met Office seems to have only made a short visit to East Anglia so far I hope you are enjoying the summer weather. Please read the proposal for timetable changes in our area. The last time 'One' as it was introduced major timetable changes it provoked much uproar over the loss of the early morning direct train to London from Bury St Edmunds and school children east of Bury could not use the train to get to school in Bury. That episode in late 2004 was in my opinion, poorly handled as it seemed to many travellers that a deal had been done to obtain the franchise and public consultation was overlooked and feedback ignored. The railway management seem to have learned a lesson and now there are clear proposals with also a clear channel through which to give feedback and opinions.

MARPA Website

The website is now live at www.marpa.org.uk The website contains information on our local stations, timetable information and details of walks that start and finish at stations on the Ipswich to Cambridge line. Our thanks go to Lloyd Butler and Roger Wolfe for their considerable help in the construction and development of the site.

Peterborough London direct train services timetable change consultation

We have received an e-mail from NXEA and a copy of a press release giving a first look at plans for the development of the rail service in East Anglia over the remaining period of the NXEA franchise. The main points are reproduced below – the details stray outside the strict MARPA area but as Cambridge – Ipswich services are often used as a 'feeder' into the main line network, I'm trying to give an overview of the bigger picture. In April 2009 National Express East Anglia signed an agreement with the Department for Transport (DfT) to introduce an extra 188 carriages onto the National Express East Anglia network (a 17% increase in the size of the train fleet).

This deal enables NXEA to provide thousands of extra seats into London Liverpool Street – especially during the peak periods. A fleet of 30 x 4 carriage, new electric trains (120 vehicles) will be provided for the Stansted Express services and potentially some Cambridge – London West Anglia services, enabling 21 of the existing Class 317s to be used to lengthen other services (mainly on West Anglia). An additional 17 x 4 carriage Class 321 electric units will transfer from London Midland to operate on the Great Eastern Mainline.

NXEA believe the benefits of more capacity on Mainline services, some faster Norwich – London services, an hourly Ipswich – Lowestoft service, longer trains from Norwich and Ipswich to Cambridge, more frequent services for some Essex stations and a faster Harwich – London journey time are crucial not just for rail passengers, but for the sustainable, economic prosperity of the region. These are all unlocked by the redeployment of the diesel fleet. To achieve the aims direct services from Harwich, Lowestoft and Peterborough to London would be replaced by local services connecting with intercity services, but by ensuring easy connections and the frequency (East Suffolk) and journey time (Harwich line) upgrades, passengers and communities along the routes will gain a better overall service and become markedly more accessible. Rail also becomes more competitive and convenient against road along the A14 corridor.

The timetable changes and some associated capacity improvements are planned for December 2010, followed by further capacity improvements in May 2011 and December 2011.

The plans do not include any additional diesel trains, so the improvements are only deliverable if the current Lowestoft and Peterborough – London direct services run to Ipswich, for passengers to change on to an intercity service for London. In other words, all the extra capacity on the off peak Great Eastern mainline services, Norwich – Cambridge services, Ipswich – Cambridge services and increased hourly frequency on the Ipswich – Lowestoft

route, plus the faster Norwich – London off peak services will not be delivered if the current service pattern (with through trains from Lowestoft/ Peterborough – London) is retained.

The NXEA view is that the 3 carriage Class 170s currently offer very inefficient use of capacity south of Ipswich - with only 192 seats compared to 299 on a Class 321 train or 280 on a Class 360 train. In addition, the use of Class 321s or 360s in these slots on the Ipswich – London route would enable extra capacity to be provided for seasonal and special events in a way which is not currently possible. Other improvements to be delivered from redeployment of the diesel fleet include :

- provide an additional peak service from Lowestoft to Ipswich and return;
- reduce the impact of service perturbations and improve operational resilience by operating more, short, self-contained service groups.
- improve punctuality as customers can board less crowded trains more easily;
- improve performance on both mainline and rural services.

The three specific issues on which NXEA are seeking views are as follows :

1. The proposal to optimise peak period capacity on the Norwich to London route with longer intercity services from Norwich operating at a slightly reduced frequency and using the Class 360 and Class 321 trains to offer more seats on some trains between Stowmarket/Ipswich and London.
2. The proposal to deliver more off peak capacity south of Ipswich, more capacity on most trains between Norwich and Cambridge, more capacity on most trains between Ipswich and Cambridge and an hourly service between Ipswich and Lowestoft (after completion of Beccles Loop and between Ipswich and Saxmundham before then) – recognising that the only way to achieve these significant benefits is to revise the timetable and the train fleet utilisation, so that journeys between Lowestoft/Peterborough and London will involve a change at Ipswich.
3. Our proposal to deliver quicker Norwich – London off peak services, faster Harwich to London journeys and more off peak non-intercity services calling at stations such as Kelvedon and Ingatestone - given that to achieve these benefits might involve intercity trains no longer stopping at Shenfield and passengers for the Harwich line changing at Manningtree, as was the case before 2004.

It should be recognised that the enhancements in points 2 and 3 cannot happen without altering the timetables as described, because no extra diesel rolling stock is planned for this franchise under current Department for Transport plans for the remainder of this Greater Anglia franchise - which runs to 2014.

Please send your comments by Friday 11 September 2009 or earlier if possible to

Metro, Mainline and Rural timetable consultation
National Express East Anglia
Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London
EC1Y 1HQ

Or email them to nxeattconsultation@nationalexpress.com

Counting passengers at Newmarket

On Thursday April 23rd a group of MARPA and Railfuture members took it in turns to stand on Newmarket station to count numbers of passengers getting on and off each train, with permission of the Train Operating Company, National Express East Anglia.

Why would we do such a thing on a beautiful Spring day? As a group pressuring for better service from our trains and stations we have to have information to back up our arguments for improvements. We had an impression that since the introduction of the hourly service a few years back, much larger numbers are being attracted to it but we did not have hard facts. One place where strong growth appeared to be happening was Newmarket, a large important town that seemed to be responding to the new service level well but with a rather unattractive rail gateway to it.

Why Thursday? We are told by the railway industry that Thursday is the 'average' day of the seven in a week so we should be able to get a fairly accurate snapshot of what usage is like. There was not a race meeting on to give a distortion of usage.

The team of volunteers agreed their place in the count- roster throughout the day. At least one person was in place to observe every train from 06.11 to 23.04. Every train serving the station picked up and deposited passengers. The largest numbers getting on/off a single train were 57 at 07.51 to Cambridge and the least 3 at 22.15 to Cambridge. All in all 452 people used the trains at Newmarket station on April 23rd. The strongest flows of users were to/from Cambridge. If Thursday is the average day of the week approximately 164,528 users are now joining/alighting trains a year... a considerable rise on previous years. It was notable that the train service ran to time throughout the day.

We have informed the Train Operating Company, the District and Town councils of our findings. Apart from the actual numbers using the service we noted that the platform shelters were three nondescript, unattractive bus shelters unable to cover more than a small number of the passengers waiting on the station. These shelters also give a very poor image to an increasingly important gateway to the town. We noted that although the town centre is only a few minutes walk from the station, signage for pedestrians in both directions is poor. Signage for motorists wishing to find the station is poor and inconsistent also. Directions from the station to Tattersalls, the Racing Museum, the race courses is entirely lacking. We have urged the District and Town Councils to work with National Express East Anglia to rectify these omissions by erecting suitable shelter and systematic signage. Finally it was noted that car parking is very restricted and more thought needs to be applied as to how this can be rectified, that the train information system monitors were erratic in their performance.

Peter Wakefield

Marpa AGM – April 2009

At the AGM on 25 April Geraint Hughes and Neil O'Hare of National Express East Anglia (NXEA) updated us on various matters;

- 2009 was the mid point of the 10 year franchise and although there will be a review in 2011 the operator has already achieved its targets. The current punctuality of the trains run by NXEA, which is measured every four weeks, showed that 90.4% of all trains arrived on time. For the rural routes this was 92.7%.
- Passenger numbers along the Ipswich to Cambridge line continue to grow although this is slowing. The line has carried 1.02 million passengers since the introduction of the hourly timetable which is a 48% growth on the previous similar period. The number of travellers carried between Newmarket and Cambridge shows a 50% growth and interestingly the end to end passenger numbers has grown by 192%. This increase is posing a problem of capacity and NXEA are keeping a close eye on this (and so is Marpa!).
- As had been reported in the Press NXEA had secured an additional 188 vehicles to help with capacity especially into London. There was to be consultation with stakeholders and User groups, such as Marpa, on the planned new timetable for December 2010 and this was likely to commence in June. *Stop Press – this consultation has now started and is referred elsewhere within this Newsletter.*

Increase in Annual Subscriptions

As a result of additional demand on the Associations funds, for example to maintain the new web-site, it was agreed at the AGM that the annual subscription for an individual member would rise from £3.50 to £4.00, for family members it would rise from £4.50 to £5.00 and for Concessions from £2.50 to £3.00. As acknowledged by the members at the AGM, this is the first rise for many years and is simply to cover basic overheads.

Road Crossing in Fornham Road, Bury St Edmunds

Marpa has for a long time been extremely concerned with safety at the road crossings at either end of Station Hill in Bury and especially the one near to Tesco. The Association has written numerous letters to the County Council pleading with them to install a crossing before some-one gets seriously hurt trying to cross this busy road between the station and the supermarket. Marpa, in frustration with the lack of information and activity, wrote to David Ruffley MP on the subject. Mr Ruffley wrote back to say that he had written to Suffolk County Council who had told him that options had been investigated to reduce the likelihood of an occurrence of personal injury collisions at this crossing. There were some visibility / lighting issues to resolve but that it was proposed that a crossing would be installed later this year.

Marpa will monitor this situation carefully.

Flower planters at Bury Station

Marpa has written to NXEA about the various planters around the station that have no flowers in. There have been all sorts of rumours as to why this is the case but, whatever the reason, it makes the station, and especially the platform area, look neglected. Neil O'Hare said that he had been in touch with the organisers of 'Bury in Bloom' about this and was awaiting a reply. Again Marpa will keep an eye on this.

Track Bed

The Association has for many months now been in contact with Network Rail over the increase in vegetation in the central area between the running lines in Bury and that it is now an eyesore. Marpa had requested some action to make this area more pleasing to the eye. This area apparently does not get the full force of the regular weed killing trains than run through but we were promised that this would be attended to by hand. Sadly the weeds, and especially the buddleia, are thriving. Network Rail have told us that they are reluctant to consider options for this area as one of the options on the upgrade of the line through Bury is to reinstate a central running line to assist the movement of freight through the station and save fuel as the speed limit will be higher than running through the platforms.

The options that Network Rail are pursuing are apparently still unknown but we will keep pressing on this issue.

Haughley Junction to Peterborough

The line through Bury towards Peterborough is a very important freight route and many trains pass through each day. Network Rail has already spent much time and money on work to allow the bigger containers to pass along this route. Now the line is being looked at to increase the capacity so to allow more trains to pass along. This work appears as a high priority in the latest Route Plans which were published in the Spring of this year. Marpa understands that the funding for this work has been secured so that bigger and more frequent trains can pass along the route from Felixstowe to Nuneaton. Work likely to be undertaken locally to facilitate this upgrade is to double the track through Haughley Junction, which was singled by British Rail in the early 1980's as a cost cutting measure but is now a bottleneck, and to reduce the length of the signalling section between Bury and Kennett. Subsequent to this, Network Rail has now published its electrification strategy and this route features highly in its list of works. This will enable many more freight trains to use electric traction throughout, to cut cost. Currently even though many of the trains travel for many miles 'under the wires' they, through necessity, are still diesel hauled. It is also interesting to note that if the electrification mentioned above takes place then the section between Chippenham Junction (near Newmarket) and Coldham Lane Junction (near Cambridge) would then be a very high priority for electrification as then all Ipswich to Cambridge trains could use electric traction.

Newmarket Race Days

Marpa has been informed that on Friday 10th July, which was a race day at Newmarket, the 17.16 from Ipswich to Cambridge arrived as a single carriage Class 153 unit. The train already heavily loaded was met by about 150 people wishing to travel. As the train left Newmarket it was estimated that there were between 60 -70 passengers standing with many not bothering to board!

It is on these occasions that the railways often let themselves down. This is not the first time that we have heard horror stories like this and when events like the Lowestoft Air Show can attract additional rail services surely something similar can be considered for race days at Newmarket.

We are constantly in touch with NXEA about capacity on this line and they are aware of the above situation and will, apparently, be checking the dates of future race days to assess capacity.

Contacting MARPA

If you have any ideas or issues you think we should be aware of, please contact the Hon. Secretary on 01284 703308 (between 7 and 8.30 pm if possible) or e-mail him on secretary@marpa.org.uk

List of Useful Web-Sites

National Rail Timetable

The Network Rail National Rail Timetable can be found at <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/3828.aspx>

National Express website

The NX website is www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com and can be used to plan local journeys and provide journey check information. Generally the website is useful and well worth a browse if you have not looked at it recently.

MARPA Membership Rates

Membership rates are Adult - £4.00; Family - £5.00. Concessions - £3.00 (Student, over 60 or UB40)

Cheques made payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association' and send to:-

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