

Marpa

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

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Autumn 2015 Newsletter

Welcome to the autumn 2015 newsletter. Our line continues to offer a reasonable and reliable basic service but as the items on passenger information and Bury Stationmasters house show, it can still be greatly improved by attending to the details and improving the passenger experience. MARPA will be maintaining vigilance at this time when an existing franchisee's focus can slip as attention in the train operating company focuses on the forthcoming franchise.

Elmswell Passenger Information

It has long been a concern of mine that Elmswell has no passenger information system. I never understood the logic that had TV screen type information on the stations at Needham Market and Thurston yet only a help point at Elmswell. My early experiences of using the help point were somewhat mixed. If the call from the help point was answered at all it was generally by someone who didn't know the answer, or if the answer was 'its cancelled' never knew the answer to the next question of 'is there a taxi coming, is there a replacement bus or will the 'lineside incident' last a long time? Information is always very important to the passenger as when your train fails to appear you need to know how to react, telephone work to say you will be late, go home and have a cup of tea, or to get the car out and drive to Stowmarket or Ely or where ever has a train service when it is very disrupted. I was therefore delighted to see that Elmswell now has a new style information point with a LED dot matrix of train running information. This was swiftly followed by disappointments as it appears to be one machine near the Cambridge bound platform. This is a problem for Ipswich bound passengers as do you venture over the level crossing to see the screen and risk being cut off if the barriers come down whilst you are trying to work out what information is available, or stick the correct sides of the track in ignorance? I have now been down several times to inspect the machine to see it is not working, and to my knowledge it has spent more weeks not working than working. What the passengers from Elmswell have long wanted are platform mounted dot matrix displays and this is what we still need. My comments are based on the years when I used to get the 1st train in the morning from Elmswell to London – before modern mobile technology became widespread but I believe they are still valid

Committee Members

We would still welcome any new committee members, please feel free to attend a committee meeting as a 'trial' to see if you think it's a good way to spend a Saturday morning. Details on committee meetings from John Drake who can be emailed at secretary@marpa.org.uk

Emails

I welcome feedback to my newsletter, please feel free to email me at the above address. I might not have the time to get involved in lengthy correspondence though!

Treasurer

Following Ann Henderson's retirement from the role of treasurer I have taken on the role with that of membership secretary. I still have not got all the relevant authorisations with our banker yet so please forgive a delay in paying in membership cheques. I have them safe, but if you want to check please contact me

Bury St Edmunds Stationmasters House

Smiths Row Gallery in Bury St Edmunds are continuing their project to relocate to the station premises. I thought it best to repeat their press release in full rather than pick out details.

'Smiths Row would like to share more news about our move to a much bigger and ambitious art gallery and artists' studios, centred at the Station Master's House at Bury St Edmunds railway station.

This is a once in a decade opportunity to fulfill long-held ambitions for a larger space for artists' studios, a large community meeting room for events and education work, dedicated parking and garden in addition to a gallery space. The ambition is to work up and down the line and on the trains with events at towns and villages between Ipswich and Cambridge. Our initial plans for the project have been outlined in our current show, Art in Transition.

Key funding will come from the rail industry in particular: the train company that wins the bid for the East Anglia Rail Franchise. The three shortlisted train operators (Abellio/Stagecoach, National Express and First Group) began work in earnest on their bids last month and the Department for Transport will announce the successful bidder by June 2016.

We have been carrying out further consultations and research over the past six months and we have received very positive response, including a number of offers of voluntary help and potential funding. Until now our small team has managed this research, consultation and fundraising at the same time as organising exhibitions, a public art programme and events in and out of the Gallery.

With work on the franchise bid intensifying, we are entering a more critical and labour intensive phase of planning and confidential negotiations with the rail industry. Sadly, this means it is not possible to continue to run the Gallery and Shop and so, we have agreed, in consultation with our funders that we will be closing the Shop and the Gallery on 6th November to concentrate on developing our partnership with the rail industry.

We will be running a programme of public events, many of them free of charge, as part of our proposed move to the station to further encourage involvement of local residents and community groups in the project.'

D Train Project

In August one of our committee members, Ben Walsh attended a presentation in Warwickshire of the proposed innovative 'D Train' which takes an old LUL train and re-engineers it into a relatively low cost diesel train for rural lines. Are we likely to see this train in the MARPA area? Probably not, although it could be used on other lines in East Anglia. As has been frequently stated to us, the problem with improving train frequency in this region is the lack of diesel trains, so just maybe this train could have an indirect consequence on our service pattern.

Ben writes 'I went to the former Ministry Of Defence base, at Long Marston, on the above date, to visit Viva rail and the 'D' Train.

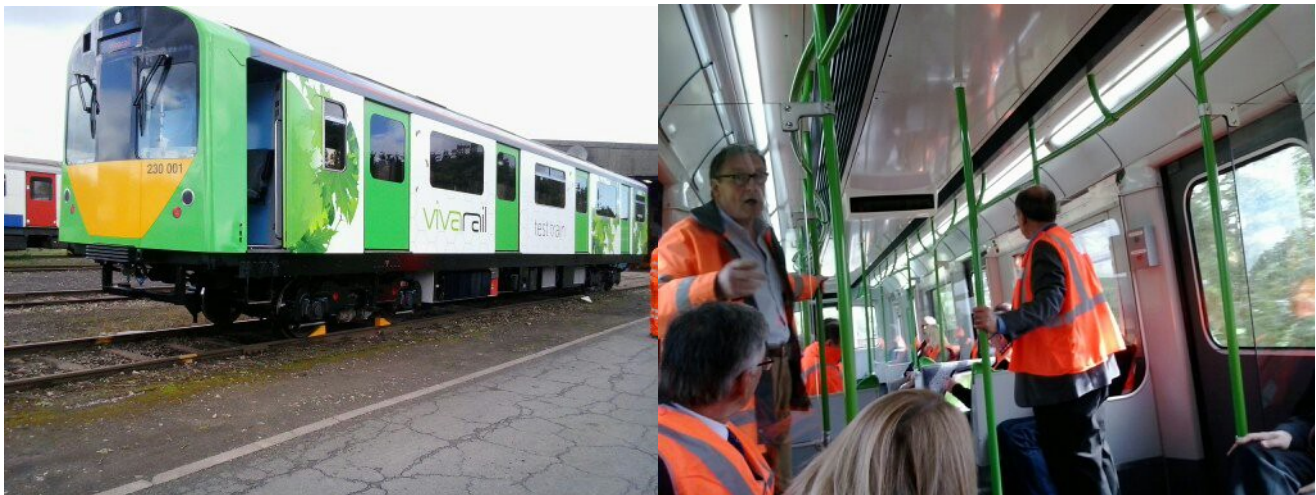
The concept, I thought, sounded quite good in that the team - led by Adrian Shooter ex-M.D. of Chiltern Railways - were there to get new stock and this has seen the development of the 'D' train which is on target to start using Network Rail 'metals' next year!

The stock is very simple to use - its just re-cycled Underground stock - which, I think, has to be an advantage as there is no new forthcoming stock for use on our railway system.

The staff all knew what they were talking about and we were given a tour of the under-carriage of the train as well as what the train will actually look like for the passenger.

We also had a tour around their test-track behind one of the actual units as if it was the real thing.

I think the train concept was really good and it shows that as long as there are some people around to 'stand up and be counted for' then our railway system won't be left in the sidings.



MARPA Membership

The membership of MARPA is from 1st August to 31st July each year. If you have **NOT** renewed for the year **2015-16** please do so now! Currently MARPA does not have the IT capability to send reminders to each and every member when the subscriptions are due other than to issue reminders in this Newsletter. Your membership is valued by us and the subscription is vital if we are to continue to campaign in support of issues that members feel strongly about in relation to our local rail routes etc.

Annual Membership Subscription Rates:

Adult - £5.00

Family/Joint - £6.00

Concession - £4.00

(Student / Senior / Unwaged / Disabled)

Please renew your 2014/ 2015 subscription by getting in touch with our Membership Secretary (Peter Rutt 01359 242464). His address is:-

MARPA (Membership)

c/o Well House, The Street, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, IP30 9BS

Please make your cheque payable to 'Mid Anglia Rail Passengers Association'.

WEB SITE REMINDER

A further reminder to visit/use our website www.marpa.org.uk

Autumn Issues on our route

The Network Rail railhead treatment train passing Elmswell 29/10/15. This train water jets the rail head to prevent trains slipping on leaf mulch in the autumn 'leaf fall' season.



Despite the running of the railhead treatment trains, performance this leaf fall season appears to have been less than acceptable. MARPA are aware of many cancelled and late running trains. I reproduce below the apology from Greater Anglia.

'We apologise for the ongoing impact of train service cancellations on some local routes in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. The problems are due to some of our diesel trains suffering wheel damage, as a result of poor rail conditions. This situation leads to excessive wear on the wheels which must be repaired before the trains can re-enter service. On average we are currently seeing two trains arrive back at the end of each day with wheel damage, more than double the rate we have experienced in previous autumn periods.

We are doing everything possible to repair the trains affected as fast as we can (including sending trains to other locations with spare capacity for wheel repairs - to speed up the process of returning trains back into service - and seeking to hire additional trains temporarily, though other train operators are suffering similar problems, so we have not yet succeeded) and we are working with Network Rail to try and improve rail conditions to try and prevent further damage. We hope that the situation should improve over the course of this week and that we will be able to eliminate these cancellations and restore the normal service. In the meantime, we are seeking to minimise the impact of the disruption by providing bus replacement services wherever practical to cover for the cancelled train services.

Under our Delay Repay scheme, customers whose journeys have been disrupted by the problems can claim compensation by contacting our customer relations team at contactcentre@abelliogreateranglia.co.uk