



## NEWSLETTER Summer 2025

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### WELCOME

Welcome to this Spring edition of the MARPA newsletter. Does anyone else watch Michael Portillo's 'Continental Rail Journey's' programme? I was interested to see on his journey through Switzerland that he travelled on several trains identical to those we travel on in East Anglia. It made me realise that our local trains really are top quality for local trains, and look especially good in gold!

### THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR



As I sit and write this, in the wonderful warm Spring sunshine, I have spent some time reflecting on what has been happening on the local railway since our last circulation. It has

been surprisingly busy!

As ever, we try to keep in touch with Greater Anglia, as our local operator, and we met with Alan Neville, GA's Stakeholder &

Partnerships Manager, on a couple of occasions. We had a direct meeting with him in Newmarket in early March and Peter Feeney has written a short report on this which appears later. Alan also attended our AGM in Bury on 29<sup>th</sup> March and gave us an interesting update from the operator's perspective and, very recently, I attended the annual GA Stakeholder Event in Stratford, London. This is when we get a full update from GA in respect of performance etc. and are then able to challenge, ask questions and put forward our views. More on this later!

Looking back at the AGM, we said thanks to both Bryan Moss and Keith Jobson as they stood down from the committee. We are pleased that they remain as members and are grateful to them both for their hard work over the years. We are also delighted to welcome John Ford onto the committee. John, whose lives near to Kennett, was formally co-opted on at the April committee meeting and he brings a wealth of knowledge and useful contacts! We look forward to working with him. In fact, I first met John at a recent meeting at Kennett station attended by Nick Timothy, the MP for West Suffolk, when we were discussing the possibility of additional stopping trains at the station. John writes separately about this

meeting later. We are now exploring this further with GA.

You are probably aware that MARPA has concerns about the ticketing situation at Bury station, in that there is no formal ticket office anymore and so the full range of tickets are not available to customers. For the size of the station we don't think that this is acceptable. I challenged GA about this at the aforementioned Stakeholder meeting and we are now making arrangements to meet them to see what can be done about this. Watch this space.

Finally, may I mention the Railway 200 events this year, and into next, when we celebrate 200 years of the first passenger railway between Stockton & Darlington, which first ran on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1825. There will be events around the country and also an exhibition train, named Inspiration, touring the country. It visits Norwich between 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> August and then moves to Lowestoft between 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August. Tickets to visit the train are free but must be booked in advance. For further information visit - [www.railway200.co.uk](http://www.railway200.co.uk)

That's it for this time. I hope that you enjoy this edition and, of course, the summer ahead.

Ross

## **MARPA LIAISON MEETING WITH GREATER ANGLIA, MARCH 2025**

The topics explored at our last meeting with Stakeholder & Partnerships Manager Alan Neville included

### *Bury ticketing arrangements*

It was agreed that MARPA would try to gather evidence regarding use of the Ticket Operating Machine, a facility we understand is unique to Bury in the stations operated by GA. It was accepted that the TVM (Ticket Vending Machine – as installed at all stations) is still unable to meet all ticketing needs – including refunds, rail cards and advance ticket sales. Whilst GA assures us that staffing levels at Bury are reviewed in the light of increasing traveller numbers using the station, MARPA's concern is that with rising demand the capacity of existing staffing levels to cope with a range of

customer-facing tasks is stretched. And we remain sceptical about GA's argument that the absence of formal complaints about ticketing arrangements means there isn't an issue at the station – we have no idea how many potential travellers are put off when they discover a particular ticketing requirement can't be met. We will continue to press GA on this matter.

### *Community Rail Partnership*

The latest news is that work is underway by Suffolk County Council to appoint a partnership officer. The name of the new entity is to be determined by a competition to be run later this year. MARPA will have a place on the CRP's management board. A formal launch for the partnership will take place in due course.

### *Scope for timetable improvements post December 2025*

Early work on a revised regional timetable is now underway. Some enhancement is possible from May or December 2026. GA is aware of the long term MARPA wish list, including a later final train from Cambridge, more services stopping at Kennett and a faster end to end overall journey time between Cambridge & Ipswich.

### *Station-specific concerns*

- *Thurston* (barrow crossing plus shelter westbound)

GA has confirmed that a safety announcement re the crossing will be incorporated in the auto announce on board system on westbound trains in the near future. To be confirmed at next liaison meeting. The issue of replacing the current shelters at Elmswell & Thurston is also under active review. Again, an update is promised for next meeting.

- *Elmswell* (shelter eastbound) As above

- *Stowmarket* (access issues at front of station)

GA has produced a checklist of agreed improvements for disabled and pedestrian station users for distribution to stakeholders who attended the site meeting at the end of January 2025 (see item on p.4 below).

- *Bury* (westbound waiting facilities)

Whilst this is still on GA's wish list, it is potentially complicated by news that there is a commercial tenant looking to rent the old

stationmaster's house – which may have a bearing on space left available for waiting facilities.

- Cycle storage at unstaffed stations

It was agreed that current facilities are not always satisfactory, despite welcome recent action at Elmswell and that the topic needs further discussion.

If you have any rail-related issues you would like us to pursue with either Greater Anglia or Network Rail, please contact Peter Feeney - [secretary@marpa.org.uk](mailto:secretary@marpa.org.uk) or phone 07309 650429.

## RAIL 200

The Stockton and Darlington Railway opened in September 1825 with a gala and local celebrations. This event has been taken as the birth of the modern railway and on major anniversaries celebration events have taken place. The last big one being in 1975 on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, you might remember the '150 years of' series of books, and British Rail ran special trains and a 'cavalcade' of historic locomotives. This year the main event is 'The Greatest Gathering' of historic locomotives and multiple units to be held at Derby in August. Tickets for that sold out very quickly with the modern issues of the website not able to handle the volume of traffic. There are events all around the country but there is also the Exhibition Train which will be touring various locations from late June. As Ross notes in his "Thoughts from the Chair" on page 2, the train can be visited in Lowestoft and Norwich on dates in August. But you will need to book ahead, as he points out. The Railway 200 celebrations allow for all sorts of events and organisations to get in on the anniversary. There is an interactive map on the website and this shows local events at Bressingham in May and in Ely in August.

[www.railway200.co.uk/search-for-activities-and-events/](http://www.railway200.co.uk/search-for-activities-and-events/)

## NEWMARKET & EAST WEST RAIL - PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

East West Rail Company late last year conducted a 'non-statutory consultation' asking for comments and suggestions for its proposed 'preferred route' for the new railway between Harston (southwest of Cambridge) via Cambourne, to just north of Bedford.

As a result, it is expected that a final recommendation for the preferred route will be set out in a 'Statutory Consultation' towards the end of 2025.

Congestion at Cambridge station is one of the biggest problems facing EWR. It is proposing an hourly service of at least 4 trains each way on the new line, stretching capacity at an already busy station to impossible limits.

A solution to current and future congestion at Cambridge station is to just "pause" as many trains as possible at a through platform and quickly send them on their way to 'turn-back' at a less congested station up the line. Suggestions where this could happen include Cambridge North and the new, yet to be constructed, station at Waterbeach New Town.

However, another intriguing suggestion has been put forward by the Managing Director of East West Rail Company, David Hughes, that in addition to Cambridge North, trains could continue across Cambridge to a new station at Cambridge East and on to turn-back at Newmarket.

Any turn-back at Newmarket would only work, of course, if the railway between there and Cambridge had its second track restored and was electrified.

We in MARPA fully support all of the above. The turn-back at Newmarket would facilitate a much more frequent (and probably faster) passenger service along the whole of the Ipswich to Cambridge route AND would make the restoration of the Newmarket West Curve viable, enabling through trains from Ely direct to Soham, Newmarket, Cambridge East and Cambridge.

This reminds us just how versatile and adaptable the railway has proved to be... It is 200 years since the world's first



passenger railway opened between Stockton and Darlington in County Durham. The railway has continually evolved since then. It has successfully faced up to social and economic change. Locally, the railway allowed the hugely important equine industry in and around Newmarket to grow into a national if not world leader. Until the 1960s it allowed thorough-bred horses and their attendants to quickly travel all around the country in special horse-box trains... and out and home again in a day.



The photo above shows a horse box from the 1960s marooned in the National Railway Museum, Shildon, Co Durham. Appropriately a stone's throw from the inland end of the Stockton & Darlington Railway... yes Shildon, not Darlington. Three horses, a comfortable compartment for the grooms including a toilet.

Of course, today most who travel to the races drive and the horses move around in horse boxes on the road. But it is possible that the East West Railway is about to allow the railway to play a huge part in the economic life of Newmarket once again!

## One small step...

The photo gives evidence of a modest step towards better access at Stowmarket station. Campaigners – including MARPA - were concerned that the disabled parking bays near the car park ticket machine had been installed without a dropped kerb. Credit to Greater Anglia – when the omission was pointed out at a site visit in January it was agreed an adjacent dropped kerb was essential. Work to make the necessary adjustment had been completed before the end of March. Further steps to enhance pedestrian access at the front of the station are pending until the new footbridge/lift has been installed later this summer.





## FREIGHT – IT'S NOT ALL SHIPPING CONTAINERS!



Freightliner 'orange' 66502 whines past Elmswell in the spring sunshine taking ballast wagons back to the big infrastructure maintenance hub of Whitemoor near March in Cambridgeshire.



DB red 66025 glides through Elmswell hauling stone (granite) from Mountsorrel quarry in Leicestershire to the aggregates terminal at Barham, near Needham Market.

## IMPROVING SERVICES AT KENNETT

A group of local residents from Moulton and Kentford, together with our chairman Ross, met with the West Suffolk MP Nick Timothy on 29<sup>th</sup> March at Kennett Station. It is the latest stage in a long running campaign to persuade Greater Anglia to timetable all trains on the Cambridge to Ipswich service to stop at Kennett. There is only a 2 hourly service during the middle of the day despite trains passing hourly.

Back in 2019 when the previous West Suffolk MP wrote on behalf of residents, GA said that it would review the service when the new faster trains were introduced. The 2 hourly service during the off-peak hours still remains. And on Sundays it is 2 hourly throughout the day.

A Facebook survey of local villages in 2021, and a recent follow up, produced a huge response illustrating the frustration with the current level of service. Just missing a connection at Cambridge means a 2 hour wait. Many of the passengers are students at Cambridge 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges. Their college times vary, meaning that parents must shuttle between Newmarket and Kennett. Cycle travel is not practicable for them. The bicycle may be at Kennett and the student at Newmarket!

Nick Timothy agreed to write to GA and the Department of Transport. He will also liaise with Charlotte Cane, the MP for Ely and East Cambridgeshire.



*Left to right, Ross Taylor, John Ford, unknown & Nick Timothy MP*

## **MARPA AGM 29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025 – HOPES FOR THE FUTURE**

The Annual General Meeting was held as in previous years at the Friends Meeting House in Bury St Edmunds. Notes from the meeting are now available on the MARPA website.

Our two guest speakers provided the audience with much food for thought. Alan Neville from Greater Anglia naturally stressed the progress the train operator has made in ensuring high rates of punctuality and reliability in the two train fleets that form the rolling stock for all GA services – the Stadler trains operating the regional and intercity routes (including of course the Mid Anglia) and the Alstom Avenra fleet operating the extensive commuter fleet in the south of the network into London Liverpool Street station. His talk also highlighted the ongoing growth in passenger numbers. This in turn sparked discussion about already very busy services at peak times in and out of Cambridge, and how the train operator might be able to address that demand.

MARPA hopes that the arrival of a revised timetable during 2026 will mean that some of our long term aspirations for the service will be met, including a shorter overall journey time between Cambridge and Ipswich. It is high time that the demonstrated technical superiority and performance of the train fleet was reflected in improved journey times. Our ongoing lobbying of Greater Anglia on those aspirations will continue!

Sarah Grove from the Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton Community Rail Partnership provided a different and very illuminating angle on the railway. She demonstrated how it is not merely a highly efficient and environmentally friendly way of getting from A to B – it can also provide multiple opportunities for the communities it serves to become more involved, whether that's school children helping design murals, volunteers helping to green the environment in stations as adopters or initiatives aimed at encouraging more people to use the train

service. An innovative project she highlighted, involving the CRP with CAMRA, the local district council and the train operators, was the promotion of a "Rail & Ale" trail – highlighting walking routes between five south Cambridgeshire stations and fifteen local pubs. Started in 2024, the trail has been good for local businesses, good for the train operators – and good for all the people using the train and getting some valuable exercise as they socialise. Sarah's talk offered a valuable insight into the potential of a CRP to work with partners to give the railway a much higher local profile. With the imminent arrival of a Mid Anglia CRP, it is MARPA's view that there are exciting times ahead for communities on our route. And this can only be good for the continued development of the service and facilities for everyone using the trains.

**Our next Newsletter is due to be published in August 2025**