

Branch Meeting in Cambridge

Larry Heyman of First Capital Connect (FCC) gave the 25 or so people at our December meeting a long and detailed explanation of FCC's first eight months in business. Larry is FCC's Integration and Partnership Manager which means he is responsible for initiating better coordination with other transport modes, as well as nurturing close relationships with local authorities and user groups.

It became obvious that whatever problems our ex-WAGN routes might have, the ex-Thameslink routes were worse, at least in terms of overcrowding and a fragile timetable (knock-on delays from south of the Thames). One option for improvement was already in use, peak hour ticket restrictions, and Mr Heyman showed figures indicating these were already having the desired effect of reducing overcrowding on some services through 'redistribution'. Mr Heyman did concede that the introduction could have been much better handled. The other options, however, will take longer to implement and are covered later in this newsletter.

Other expenditure, however, *is* under way, as Larry Heyman pointed out; such as new toilets, waiting rooms and ticketing facilities at stations. FCC are in discussion with developers about funding lifts at St Neots station, as indeed are the Branch regarding general station improvements there. We expect to see the plans shortly. The new car park operator, NCP, is having to work to much higher standards of maintenance and security than hitherto as well.

Larry Heyman also pointed out that 40 more people are being employed to deter the estimated 10% of travellers who journey without ticket, plus 24 Community Support Officers to patrol trains and enhance passenger security.

All in all a fascinating talk followed by many pertinent questions. Certainly a Meeting well worth attending.

FCC plans to tackle overcrowding

First Capital Connect (FCC) has developed plans to deal with overcrowding on peak-hour services between London Kings Cross, Kings Lynn and Peterborough. The

additional services and longer trains. It is hoped that some of these proposals can be implemented with the December 2007 timetable, other aspects are dependent of the completion of infrastructure work and finding additional rolling stock.

The timetable for Peterborough services is generally unchanged with two stopping and two fast trains each hour during the peak period. Timetable changes are concentrated on the Cambridge route. The existing stopping trains to Letchworth, are cut back to Welwyn Garden City to allow for new semi-fast services to Royston. The Cambridge fast services will run non-stop to Cambridge and some will be strengthened to 12 cars. These changes will require an extra 5 x 4 coach trains or equivalent to implement and the additional seating provided will reduce the number of people having to stand.

A number of options for providing additional rolling stock have been investigated. New electric trains or existing trains moved from elsewhere could be provided, although this would depend on the power supplies to the overhead lines being upgraded in some places. The alternative would be to provide diesel trains, either modified High Speed Train sets or locomotive hauled coaches displaced from the West Coast Main Line. Although not compatible with the existing electric trains, making them less flexible in use, this option may prove to be more realistic in the short term. The diesel trains would most likely be used on the Peterborough fast trains, where their higher top speed can be used to compensate for longer station times due to the reduced number of doors.

In addition to the new rolling stock some platform extensions will be required. Platforms at Cambridge will need extending to take 12 car trains, although the worksite to do this, has now been taken over by the Cambridge Guided Bus project! Extending platforms at Royston and Letchworth, though not essential, is also being considered, even though 12 car trains would not normally stop at these stations, as it would increase operating flexibility.

The Branch has welcomed these proposals and we will be urging the Government to ensure that they are implemented as quickly as possible.

Rail News

FCC has introduced ticket barriers at Stevenage Station to reduce those travelling without a ticket and to deter anti-social behaviour. Other stations, including Huntingdon and Cambridge (*see Wakefields Words.*) will get barriers later this year

One Railway has fitted CCTV cameras to the Class 321 trains used on services between London and Colchester, Clacton and Ipswich.

Central Trains services were disrupted over the Christmas and New Year period as train crew refused to work on Sundays. There is no formal agreement to work on Sundays and the company relies on staff to volunteer. This has become critical and must be sorted out, ideally by the Department of Transport with those who would wish to take up the new franchise due to enter operation towards the end of this year. *Make your view known: write to: rail@dft.gsi.gov.uk on e-mail or to: Rail Franchise Directorate, Dept. for Transport, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, SW1P 4DR*

Andrew Chilvers has taken over as Managing Director at One Railways. He replaces Dominic Booth who has moved to Ned Railways UK.

Government responds to the East of England Plan

The Government has issued its response to the Inspector's Report on the East of England Spatial Strategy. As noted in previous editions of Rail East, the Planning Inspector had backed the views of the Branch and other groups that the Regional Transport Strategy was not sustainable and did not reflect the need to tackle climate change. There were fears that the Government would overrule the Inspector's comments. The good news is that this has not proved to be the case. The majority of the changes needed to reduce the need for travel and tackle traffic congestion have been supported by Government. They have however, rejected calls for an overall reduction in road traffic over the next 15 years, saying that this is not Government Policy. *(Of course not, roads produce sexy tax income! That's why Ministers are so gung-ho about gambling as well? Ed.)*

The Branch is currently reviewing the Government's comments and will issue a response in early March.

Norwich Focus Group

Following the success of the focus group meeting in Cambridge last year, a similar meeting is to be held in Norwich. It's all designed to increase dialogue and understanding between the Branch Committee and ordinary Members, especially those who do not usually attend Branch Meetings or get 'active'! The feedback helps to establish our campaigning priorities for the year. As you will discover at our AGM in Bury St Edmunds Library on 24 February 2007, when a Motion to this effect will be placed before you. Once agreed, the Branch will appoint members to act as lead campaigners for these issues, responsible for raising awareness of the issue with the Government, Councils and the public. In this way the Branch moves forward, hopefully.

Wakefield's Words (or The Chairman's encounters with the railway)

Thameslink

We have written to all the Members of Parliament along the London to Peterborough and King's Lynn routes that are affected by the long-running "Thameslink" proposals, urging them to support Thameslink and to lobby the DfT. Without exception, all the Members replied, giving their support. Henry Bellingham, for example, sent the reply he'd received from the Minister for Rail, Tom Harris, who stated that the project's investment decision would be considered in the light of the conclusions of the new High Level Output Specification for the rail industry and the cross-government Comprehensive Spending Review. More delay then.... maybe understandable but extremely frustrating.

Volunteers needed.

Station Usage Counters: as you know, we have counted those passengers using Whittlesea station and handed the results on to the TOCs and local authorities concerned.

Our efforts have been greeted positively. One local authority officer stated such work is invaluable as accurate figures do not exist and usually understate usage considerably. He added that we need to be armed with such detail as no doubt we shall have fight off the DfT soon! We need to have a list of members and their friends who would not mind being contacted to count (and film?..Ed) at their local or any nearby station. Please drop a line to the Chairman or phone.

Website Specialists: we wish to use the branch website much more effectively. We would like to present our campaigns and various issues to the wider public and to help recruitment of new members. If you have skills that you could share with us, please contact the Chairman at the address given at the end of the newsletter.

Desk-Top Publishers: we wish to publish various leaflets and "localise" the membership leaflet. If you have skills in the production of such material, please contact the Chairman as above.

Scrutiny Group: there are several very important reports due out shortly: the Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for East Anglia; the RUS for the ECML and High Level Specification for the Railway Network. (A White Paper on the next 30 years of investment in the network.) We need members to read these reports, online, and make written comments, with the appropriate back-up information, to a special **Scrutiny Meeting**, to be arranged. The reports should be viewed from a regional strategic overview prospective and the outcomes expressed succinctly.

Franchises Renewal update.

As you might be aware, the Central Trains franchise is being split in to two as far as we in East Anglia are concerned. We have met and corresponded with all the bidders. We have put to them all the concerns we have and opinions about how things should go in the future. The good thing about the meetings has been the understanding by all the bidders about what has to be done. It is a pity that representatives from the DfT have not been present as they no doubt will be arbiters of what actually happens.

The East West Rail Link.

There has been, of course, the unnecessary and annoying setback to the eastern part of the scheme by the planning approval given to the infamous rowing lake on the eastern edge of Bedford. Whether it will ever be built is a moot point. However, one consequence has given rise to a feeling in ruling circles of Cambridgeshire County Council that the time and money would be better spent on promoting a parallel road upgrade scheme, *and* withdrawal from the EastWest Rail Consortium. After so much time, effort and achievement by the Consortium, this would be a great shame. It has long been agreed that a phased implementation of the project would be best; thus far much work has been "in the West" from Oxford/Aylesbury to Bletchley/Milton Keynes to Bedford, which has paid off with some very exciting things at the "tipping" stage. We would very much hope that Cambridgeshire will grit its

collective teeth and hang on so that the full scheme can be eventually completed. We shall write to each Cambridgeshire County Councillor describing the merits of the project. We would also like you to write to your councillor, if you live in the County, or to Councillor John Reynolds, at Cambridgeshire County Council, Shire hall, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP, if you do not.

The "one" West Anglia route.

The development of this route at its northern end beyond the Stansted Airport junctions, has rarely hit the headlines recently so it is good to see attention being turned to it again. "one" has introduced some very competitive off-peak fares between Cambridge and Liverpool Street, way below those for "London Terminals" and of course, it is still possible to travel home northbound in the evening peak along the route, *as long as an off peak **travel card** has been bought!* "one" has now introduced an hourly semi-fast Sunday service so that the service is virtually the same 7/7.

Audley End, for the very prosperous Saffron Walden market, is the main traffic centre and the new service is at last an attempt to serve the area as it deserves. It has been mentioned, by members in the area, that maybe renaming of Audley End with addition "for Saffron Walden" would be useful. The national timetable website would bring up the service to Audley End when Saffron Walden is typed into the search engine. A railway timetabled bus link should also be investigated... there are bus links to Saffron Walden from Audley End but these should be formalised. Useful Whittlesford is the other main traffic centre. It is pleasing "one" is promoting this important park and ride station by renaming with the "Parkway" suffix. A recent initiative is the offer of free parking to current users of Royston station car park, which should take some pressure off peak FCC services to London and save regular travellers £800 p.a! Surely this is a good, if rare, example of competition working in favour of the passenger.

Have I seen the future...?

Yes, and it's scary stuff. I recently travelled with my family to St.Ives, the one in West Cornwall, where we spent a beautiful, if wet and windy, two weeks over the end of the year. The train was FCC to/from Kings Cross (excellent) and thence First Great Western intercity service to Cornwall. The intercity service was very crowded both ways all the way to/from Truro/Redruth, where it eased off a bit. But it was to be expected being holiday time. What was *unexpected*, was the catering: no hot water ex Paddington; no, as advertised, catering trolley outward in First Class.

On return, nothing for the 2 hours from Penzance to Plymouth; just a brief apology from the hidden train manager, thence from Plymouth a stream of peremptory orders about "stock taking, no change, no trolley in First Class, we've run out of this and that, if you want to use the restaurant you must purchase a minimum amount", and so on!

Visits to the buffet car entailed long queues and mountaineering around the tasteful displays of empty catering cardboard boxes. Only one appearance of any member of staff in the 5 hour journey! A snapshot? Yes! As it was for 1,500 other passengers, many of whom only travel occasionally. So the whole thing a customer-relations

shambles. Clearly the staff have had the stuffing knocked out of them by the new franchise conditions.

Why I go on about this is to highlight what we shall probably lose when our wonderful GNER disappears. May I suggest that you use the GNER services whilst you may, to savour a golden age to tell your grand children about! (*Amen. Ed.*)

We travelled quite a bit by train locally, to/from St.Ives, Penzance and along the mainline through Cornwall. All services were busy to overcrowded. It is especially disturbing to learn a week after our return, that most of the Cornish branches had been "bustituted" for a week, as the usual stock had to be serviced back in Bristol. Lots of very sad photographs of all the modern rolling stock in store that used to work the west country services.....with passengers forced onto buses and having to stand or not travel at all as service after service is cancelled.

I wonder what our new franchises have in store for us? The battles for the railway are far from over... recruit new members now.

Plusbus Cambridge

Good news is that at long last, the rail fare add-on, "**Plusbus**", has been initiated in Cambridge. At £2.50, it is a bargain giving one day unlimited travel on all the city's bus routes operated by "Stagecoach". (But not "Cambridge Blue" 007 railway station to Grafton Centre via the city centre. But as "Stagecoach" has taken that company over, no doubt it will eventually be so). Remember, though, if you know you are going just to/from the city centre, the fare payable on the bus is £1 each way.

Station barriers at Cambridge

Cambridge station is to be "gated" by the end of 2007. FCC are paying "one" to do the job. "one" is to consult widely with all passenger, cycling and other groups about the project. The gates will be wider than normal to help cope with 800 or so bikes that pass to/from the platforms each day.

Does any of the foregoing stir a response in you? We need your feedback. Write to Peter Wakefield at the address on back page.

Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth Local Development

The stations of both towns are firmly in the proposed local development areas; indeed, at Lowestoft it has been seriously suggested that the station be moved! Do you have strong views on what the railway component of these two schemes might be? If so our President, Peter Lawrence, wants to hear from you. The formal consultation period ends on 19 February, so a speedy response is vital. For fuller details of each scheme go to: www.great-yarmouth.gov.uk or www.waveney.gov.uk or www.1steast.co.uk .

Whilst on the topic of **Lowestoft Station** redevelopment, Trevor Garrod writes: our corporate members the East Suffolk Travellers' Association (ESTA) have distributed over 1000 leaflets, encouraging rail users to object to the proposed closure of Lowestoft station and its replacement by a station further west. The ESTA leaflets invited people to write to Waveney District Council (who themselves actually have no powers to close a rail station) by the February 19th deadline. The regeneration

company 1st East has no powers to close the station either (which may be why they talk about "transforming" or "reconfiguring" it instead!) and they have produced not a shred of evidence that more people would visit the town if the station were "relocated". The ESTA leaflet describes the present centrally sited station as "a major asset" to the town and lists ten reasons for keeping it on its present position. ESTA is grateful to Railfuture members who have helped distribute the leaflet and sent in objections to Waveney District Council.

East Suffolk Travellers' Association (ESTA):

And ESTA's Annual General Meeting, will be held on Saturday 26th May in the URC Church Hall, Quay Street, Halesworth, starting at 2.00pm. The hall is at the rear of the URC Church barely ten minutes' walk from the rail station. Go down Station Road and turn right. Guest speaker will be Mr John Gummer MP (Conservative, Suffolk Coastal) - one of our most experienced local MPs.

EAST ANGLIA AND EUROSTAR

Trevor Garrod writes: on 16th December I made a day trip from Lowestoft to Paris by train, to address a meeting of Railfuture's French sister organisation, FNAUT (Federation Nationale des Associations d'Usagers dermte pu

yourself at www.do-it.org.uk I'm sure Railfuture could make use of this! We certainly need to be ready to counteract government pressure to contract the railway. One way is to obtain latest data on usage of those stations (and routes) which might well be vulnerable to a squeeze. Our work at Whittlesea last October showed how inaccurate official statistics can sometimes be. And on such tenuous official figures might some of our rail services fall. Could you help us in these tasks, however modestly? Yes? Well, contact our Chairman, or go to the 'do-it' website and register your name and details. We must act. NOW!

THANKS

To Simon Hope of Norwich and Clara Zilahi who wrote to the Editor, on quite different topics. Your turn next?

So, here's where to write with news, comment, adverse or otherwise: Chris Burton, 79 Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2DG / cfb79ten@googlemail.com 01223 352327. Or Nick Dibben whose contact details are below. We'd love to hear from you. Deadline for next issue is 20th May 2007

DON'T FORGET THE BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, AT 14.15HRS IN BURY ST EDMUNDS LIBRARY. Mr CLIVE MORRIS, RURAL LINES MANAGER FOR 'ONE' RAILWAY IS OUR GUEST SPEAKER. IF YOU WANT TO STAND FOR COMMITTEE BE QUICK. CONTACT NICK DIBBEN NOW!!

Dates for your diary

Sat 24 February 2007 - Annual General Meeting at the Library, Bury St Edmunds. Beginning 14.00hrs

NEXT BRANCH MEETING: will probably be in Ipswich early June. Details to be announced

National AGM 2007 will be held in County Hall, Pitt St, Preston on 12 May starting at 11am. See current *RAILWATCH* and website for further details.

ALSO: there will be special meetings for local members in the various towns and city's around the region over the coming year. These will be flagged up through notification to you, personally! Next on the list will be Norwich.

railfuture

the national independent voice for rail users

www.railfuture.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

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