

East Anglia

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■ ■ It all counts

The branch carried out two day-long station counts in the autumn – at Attleborough on the Norwich to Ely route and at Downham Market on the line to King's Lynn. The results and our observations have been sent on to the train operators and local authorities. At Downham Market, branch chairman Peter Wakefield reported that severe disruption to services occurred when a power cable failed near Cambridge. He said: "We were impressed with the way the 'whole' railway dealt with the incident. The clarity of information given by the local staff was good and not a single passenger expressed dissatisfaction openly but there was considerable inconvenience for many people. One family group had a tightish connection at Stansted Airport that led to a hasty car journey at a time of day when the roads are full. In many ways, Downham is a model station, worthy of emulation elsewhere. There seemed to be a non-stop procession of people at the booking office window at all times. The only fault is that there should be longer opening hours. The station really is a part of the community with all the up platform building in use as a paper shop, coffee/light refreshment shop, bar and a comfortable waiting room." But he added: "Timetabling is severely constrained by the single line section southwards to Littleport. We will certainly campaign for at least half of the single line to be re-doubled."

■ ■ Flying at Hitchin

The branch is supporting Network Rail's Transport Works Act application to build a new flyover at Hitchin to deal with a major "pinchpoint" on the East Coast main line. The new 1.4 mile long route will mean that Cambridge trains do not have to cross the other three tracks on the main line freeing up capacity. If all goes to plan the new line will be open in 2014.

■ ■ Chesterton moves forward

The stigma of Cambridgeshire being one of the few counties where no new stations have opened, looks likely to end after county councillors have agreed to press ahead with a new station north of Cambridge adjacent to the A14 and Cambridge Science Park. The station has been a branch aspiration for many years but progress has been slow. The station will have three platforms for 12-coach trains and plenty of car parking. Opening is scheduled for five years time.

■ ■ Lowestoft station

Rail campaigners received 1,290 responses to the questionnaire handed to passengers on trains to and from Lowestoft during two selected weeks, seeking their views on a regeneration company's proposal to move the station 400 metres inland. The results have been analysed and a report prepared. Financial help was received from the Railfuture Fighting Fund to help cover the costs of the exercise. If you would like a copy, please contact Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

■ ■ East Suffolk line

The East Suffolk Travellers' Association decided to oppose National Express East Anglia's proposals to withdraw the Lowestoft-London through trains, unless certain cast-iron guarantees were given first. We wrote directly to the Secretary of State. Without a passing loop at Beccles (funding for which is not guaranteed at the time of writing) the hourly service which NXEA promise from 2012 along the entire line will not be possible. We urged Lord Adonis to make approval of NXEA's plans conditional upon this key infrastructure improvement going ahead. We also urged that the promised passenger lift at Ipswich must be in position before the through trains are withdrawn and that class 170 diesel trains should continue to operate on the line otherwise business is likely to be lost.



How rail can relieve

By Simon Norton

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The Highways Agency is planning to upgrade the A14 road which parallels the Cambridge-St Ives guided busway.

The agency published details of its "statutory orders" in October and I urge Railfuture members to object before the closing date of 6 January to its proposals for what has been called the "road from hell".

In *Railwatch* 119, Peter Rayner described the Cambridgeshire guided busway as "one of the worst examples of bungled planning I have seen".

This is even more true if considered as part of a long saga relating to the Cambridge-Huntingdon corridor.

I moved to Cambridge as a student in 1969 when the road to Huntingdon, then called the A604, was a single carriageway with relatively low levels of traffic.

Passenger trains from Cambridge to St Ives soon ceased and the onward link to Huntingdon had long been closed.

In the 1970s Cambridge and Huntingdon were dragged into the motorway age.

Cambridge got a western bypass (the M11) and a northern bypass (then called the A45).

A road was also built in Huntingdon to take through traffic. Far from being a bypass, it went close to the centre, taking over part of the old railway route from St Ives and eating into Huntingdon's unique network of commons, as well as bombarding the town with traffic noise 24 hours a day.

Next a new road was built between Kettering and the M1/M6 junction, completing a fast through route to the Midlands. When this opened, the whole route from Felixstowe to the M1 was renumbered the A14.

It became a major through route for lorries from Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich to the Midlands. At the same time the route between Cambridge and St Neots became the A428 instead of the A45.

For a time, public transport users shared the benefits, as two competing operators, National Express and Cambridge Coach Services, ran coaches between Cambridge and the Midlands.

Neither started early enough for people attending meetings in Birmingham, and nor was the multi-modal option of coaches meeting trains at Rugby ever tried, though this could have beaten both rail and road for journeys between Cambridge and Birmingham.

Eventually National Express took over Cambridge Coach Services, and later all coaches between Cambridge and the West Midlands used the much slower A428 via Bedford and Northampton.

Meanwhile Steer Davies Gleave was commissioned by

Cambridgeshire County Council to look into the future of the Cambridge-St Ives/Huntingdon rail route, and, later, by the East-West Consortium to study possible rail routes between Cambridge and Oxford.

To the disappointment of Railfuture, which had been campaigning for trains to reach Oxford via St Ives, Huntingdon, St Neots and Bedford, SDG came up with the concept of the guided busway and, later, proposed that Cambridge-Oxford trains should run via Letchworth.

I often wonder if they would have come up with different answers had the order of the assignments been reversed.

Road traffic on the A14 continued to build up. The key section between Cambridge and Huntingdon carried lorries from the East Coast, lorries from the Channel Ports to the North (via the M25 and A1), and car commuters to Cambridge's Science Park and other areas. Political pressure led to the corridor being included in the first tranche of New Labour's multi-modal studies – CHUMMS – the Cambridge-Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study.

This eventually endorsed the idea of a guided busway (costing £50million) and also called for a major upgrade of the A14 including a new route for through traffic avoiding Huntingdon, at cost of £192million.

Later came the London-South Midlands multi-modal study which recommended a direct rail link between Cambridge, St Neots and Bedford following the A428 and A421, as well as reopening the rail line from Bedford to Northampton.

As coordinator of Transport 2000 Cambs & W Suffolk, I called for the public inquiry into the Great Barford Bypass (A421 ex A428), under way when the report was released, to be restarted so that it could consider how the railway would fit into the plans for the road.

I also made the same points at the public inquiries into the upgrade of the A428 west of Cambridge, and the guided busway – whose construction would make it more difficult to link a line alongside the A428 with the existing route through Cambridge. My plea was in vain each time.

The Highways Agency developed its proposals for the A14, in principle based on the CHUMMS findings, but jettisoning almost everything that was good in CHUMMS. The cost had also rocketed from £192million to about £1.2billion.

The CHUMMS recommendation to provide a public transport priority route on the existing A14 between Fen Drayton and Godmanchester when the new route opened was ignored. So Fenstanton will still have to put up with traffic noise as the existing A14 will remain the

the 'road from hell'



WHITE ELEPHANT: The Cambridge-St Ives busway near Histon was built on the ripped-up railway

Picture: Steve Wilkinson

For news of the busway, see *Misguided and Bust at* www.raifuture.org.uk/tiki-read_article.php?articleid=1092

main route between Cambridge and Huntingdon. The M11/A14/A428 interchange at Gorton will be remodelled, preventing the future addition of a slip road from the A428 to the M11. This traffic will therefore continue to cause congestion in the western approach to Cambridge, via the A1303.

As well as a dual three-lane carriageway on the A14, there would be a dual two-lane local road for traffic from Bar Hill and the planned new town at Northstowe to the Cambridge area. This will encourage new town residents to drive rather than use public transport.

The widening of the A14 north of Cambridge will feed extra traffic into the Histon Road (B1049) and Milton Road (A1309) approaches to the city centre, the very routes to be used by the guided buses.

Far from returning the Huntingdon commons to grass, the proposals will provide yet more local roads carving across them.

As usual the Highways Agency has not given sufficient consideration to the needs of non-motorists, including cyclists between Northstowe and Bar Hill (who will have a bridge, but in the wrong place), nor to visitors to Brampton Wood nature reserve and Cambridge Crematorium.

The Highways Agency figures put the scheme at the top of the league table for non-motorway schemes in terms of adding to climate change (about 132,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year).

As the Highways Agency has a habit of underestimating induced traffic, the real figures are probably far worse.

I suggest we should be seeking a major transfer of freight from road to rail on both the relevant corridors, East Anglia to the Midlands and Channel Tunnel to the North.

Moves to upgrade the railway loading gauge are already under way, but we also need to double the remaining sections of single track including Soham-Ely, and to eliminate the need for Felixstowe traffic to reverse at Ipswich.

Signalling should be upgraded so trains can run frequently, say every five minutes.

We should also seek a freight route between the Channel Tunnel and East Coast main line. One option is to use the High Speed 1 route to Rainham, Essex, then by existing tracks to Seven Sisters and Ware, then to use the new link at Hertford that has recently been proposed as an option for the East-West rail link between Stevenage and Stansted Airport.

In the longer term I would also like to see the London-South Midlands multi-modal study scheme for a direct link for east-west passenger traffic from Cambridge to St Neots, Bedford, Northampton and Birmingham. It may be possible to achieve this by rerouting less than a mile of guided busway (between the A1309 and A14), provided there is enough room alongside the A14 for it to run through the Cambridge area towards the A428.

If the A14 is widened, space must be left for the rail line.

Car traffic must be restrained in the Cambridge area and Cambridgeshire County Council is considering a congestion charging proposal.

The best chance of public acceptance for this is if the Government offers major rail improvements (including reopening to Bedford) as a sweetener.

In the short term, public transport links between Cambridge and the ECML must be improved so Cambridge people can get the benefit of fast trains on the ECML.

A combination of better connections on the existing route via Ely with rail/road links via Huntingdon or St Neots could offer a high frequency link, and tickets should be made interavailable on all relevant routes.

I hope the above will give Railfuture members some ideas as to how to formulate a coherent objection to the A14 proposals.

For the road proposals, see: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/4211.aspx

Wessex

By John Friedberger

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■ ■ Southampton tunnel

The major engineering work in southern England over Christmas and New Year will involve closure of the tunnel under Southampton city centre. The original 19th century tunnel must be re-engineered – principally by lowering the track bed – to allow freight containers to be transported by rail from the port of Southampton to the Midlands and points north in a greener, cheaper and more practical way. Passengers will be inconvenienced for no obvious direct benefit to themselves but the Wessex committee has welcomed the plan. The long-term benefit to the transport infrastructure of the country should be worth the hassle.

This closure seems to have been much better organised than previous similar exercises. South West Trains issued an understandable leaflet giving essential information in early November and Network Rail plans to cause the least possible disruption to passengers.

In essence, a reduced service on one line will run on weekdays. At weekends and over the period 25 December to 4 January the tunnel will be closed. CrossCountry and First Great Western diesel services will use diversionary routes. We will report progress in the next issue.

■ ■ Towards a seven-day railway

The Wessex division of Network Rail has formulated a plan to reduce greatly the quantity and scope of "possessions" for engineering work in future. If achieved, the next few years should see a great reduction in dreaded 'bustitutions'.

■ ■ Railfuture's David wins Heart of Wessex award



We congratulate Railfuture member David Greening (pictured left) who won first place in the "Outstanding Volunteer Contribution" category in the ACORP Community Rail Awards.

David is a founder member of the Heart of Wessex (Bristol to Weymouth) Line volunteers and has led the adoption of two stations.

Among many other contributions, he has worked on and encouraged others to keep the line's station gardens looking good for visitors.

www.heartofwessex.org.uk/

■ ■ Railfuture visit to Siemens traincare depot

The branch visit in November to the Northam depot where Siemens maintains SWT's Desiro fleet was over-subscribed. A second tour has been arranged for 12 January. There are still a few vacancies.

■ ■ Annual general meeting

The date for the AGM has been changed to Saturday 6 March 2010 at Eastleigh. Details will be sent out in February.

