

Members' Bulletin



Issue 118
Autumn 2011

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www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk

COME TO OUR AUTUMN MEETING IN OULTON BROAD

ESTA's Autumn Meeting will be held in St Mark's Church Hall, Bridge Road, Oulton Broad on Saturday October 15th. All are welcome.

The meeting has been timed to fit in with the trains from Ipswich and so will start at 14.45, ten minutes after the train from Ipswich is due into Oulton Broad South station. From the station, walk along the approach road, cross by the traffic lights and use the footbridge, to the east of the road overbridge, and the church is on your right. Alternatively, you can climb up and down two flights of steps to and from the road bridge.

If you arrive two hours earlier at Oulton Broad South, you can walk along Bridge Road and find a good range of places to eat and drink and can also enjoy Everitts Park, by the water, if the weather is fine. The meeting room will be open from 14.15.

We shall start the meeting with reports and discussion on what ESTA is doing on the public transport front, including some of our plans for the near future.

There will be a refreshment break and a stall with leaflets and sales items.

We shall welcome as guest speaker Mr Peter Aldous MP, who was elected last year as Conservative Member for Waveney. Mr Aldous is an individual member of ESTA and was also for many years a County Councillor. We look forward to hearing his views on local and national transport issues.

WHO WILL RUN OUR LOCAL TRAINS?

We should know this in October. National Express East Anglia's franchise ends in February and the new operator (Stagecoach, Abellio or Go-Ahead) will then take over for a period of 2 years and 5 months. ESTA will make contact with the successful bidder as soon as we know who has won the franchise.

SOUTHWOLD BUS QUESTIONNAIRE - OCTOBER 31ST DEADLINE

Enclosed with this Members' Bulletin is a questionnaire. We look forward to receiving replies from members who live in the Southwold area and also from members of visit - or would like to visit - Southwold and the Blyth Valley. Please send your replies to our Secretary by October 31st.

As reported elsewhere in this Bulletin, we have several concerns about the buses - or lack of them - both for local people and for visitors. Some of our local members have already sent in detailed comments on why they now use the buses less. We have therefore now decided to ask everyone to complete a questionnaire, as part of our efforts to obtain improvements in time for the 2012 summer season.

ESTA CHRISTMAS MEAL

This popular event will be held on Friday December 9th this year at the Bell Hotel, Saxmundham, commencing at 8.00 pm. Details will be sent to all members who have taken part in recent years. We hope to see new members there as well, and our Secretary will be pleased to send details as soon as they are finalised. Please send him a stamped addressed envelope.

ESTA MEETINGS IN 2012

Our Spring Meeting will be on Saturday March 17th in Halesworth.

The Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday May 5th at Melton or Woodbridge.

We shall hold an Autumn Meeting in October - date and venue to be decided.

It is also hoped to celebrate the 153rd birthday of the East Suffolk Line, on Friday June 1st.

It has been suggested that ESTA organise a summer Sunday coach trip to Bressingham, for the gardens and the steam. The coach would leave Saxmundham station in the morning and return in the early evening, connecting with trains up and down the line.

More details of these meetings and events will be in our winter Bulletin, due out in early January.

SPONSORED CYCLE RIDE

There was some unsettled weather in July, but fortunately it was fine for the first ever ESTA Sponsored Cycle Ride on Saturday 30th. Mike Farahar set out from Saxmundham and was joined at Wickham Market by Wendy Robinson and Trevor Garrod; then by the Louth family at Woodbridge. John Holland and Andrew Gee cycled up from Felixstowe.

All congregated in bright sunshine by the new footbridge and lift on Ipswich station where they were also met by two Railfuture members. Some used the new lifts to transport their bicycles over to platform 3.

Thank you to Mike Farahar for organising the event and devising a route from Saxmundham to Ipswich which skilfully avoided the A12, using a number of country lanes and cycle paths. Thank you also to members who sponsored riders. The event raised over £140 for ESTA.

EAST ANGLIA TRANSPORT MUSEUM

We again held an ESTA stall on the weekend of September 10th/11th at the East Anglia Transport Museum in Carlton Colville to promote public transport, sell publications and tell people about our work. A new feature this year was the game "Lucky Stations" devised by Alan Williams. Thank you to Rod Lock, Mike Farahar, Trevor Garrod and Alan Williams for manning the stall.

LOWESTOFT STATION

The objections by ESTA and other bodies to two proposals by the former regeneration company 1st East to relocate Lowestoft station resulted in both proposals being dropped.

Yet another consultation document has been issued, "Post Submission Schedules of Proposed Minor and Soundness Changes". This shows the second relocation proposal deleted, but the revised wording allows the proposal to relocate the station to be revived at some later date.

The wording reads: "This may include the reconfiguration of the station to facilitate development subject to feasibility and viability issues being addressed."

ESTA's Secretary has responded, saying that this amended document is not legally compliant. The revised wording is sufficiently vague to permit a proposal to be developed which includes relocation of the station. Legality is a factor in that relocation would almost certainly contravene the Railways Act 2005, in particular Statutory Instrument 2836, which relates to station/line closures.

BECCLLES STATION

In the consultation over improvements to the down side, Network Rail accepted ESTA's proposal that CCTV should be installed to protect any investment.

However, at a recent meeting with ESTA representatives, James Steward of NXEA said it was not part of the scheme.

ESTA's Secretary wrote again to Sally Harper of Suffolk County Council and Andrew Chivers of NXEA seeking clarification. Ms Harper replied that she considered CCTV "a desirable element" in the scheme and that this would need to be discussed further with the incoming Train Operating Company in November.

Mr Chivers in an earlier letter had stated that land exchange negotiations had been complex and protracted. He has now confirmed that CCTV will be included in the Station Investment Plan for the East Suffolk Line.

GREATER ANGLIA RAIL FRANCHISE - A MINISTER WRITES...

In June our Secretary wrote to local MPs voicing concerns about the recent McNulty Report on rail financing and asking how these might be reflected in the specification for the expected 15-year franchise from July 2014.

Our concerns were:

(a) the recommendation that booking offices at Category E stations (of which Lowestoft is one) should be closed;

(b) the drastic solution for regional services in order to reduce costs: cheaper trains (presumably less comfortable, and less powerful traction units), simplified track layouts and "line of sight" signalling.

Peter Aldous MP sought answers and received a reply from Mike Penning MP, the Roads Minister, who was the duty transport minister on August 1st.

Mr Penning confirmed that the interim short-term franchise will deliver the existing timetable from February 2012; that bidders are required to maximise revenue, and that the interim franchise will be required to "facilitate" the implementation of McNulty's recommendations. (It is not clear what this means, Ed)

The Minister's letter also states that "the Government is looking at ways of delivering the existing service at lower cost". He also says he is unaware of any proposals or intentions to close Lowestoft booking office.

ESTA is then advised to contact John Macquarrie at the Department for Transport about any specific areas of concern and Peter Aldous has offered to do this.

Our Secretary has therefore written to Mr Aldous making the following points:

1. The Secretary of State has said he has "broadly accepted" McNulty's recommendations, which will result in a White Paper in November, presumably to be followed by another Railways Act. The interim Greater Anglia franchise appears to pre-empt forthcoming legislation.
2. The categorisation of stations was adopted by the "Station Champions" Chris Green and Sir Peter Hall in their report, which was overtaken by the Comprehensive Spending Review, and placed Lowestoft in Category E, average daily passengers per station 700. McNulty recommends that Train Operating Companies should consider the closure of all Category E ticket offices. Presumably TOCs will be under pressure to do just that. Should this happen at Lowestoft, the station would become totally unstaffed, there being now no platform staff.

INCIDENTALLY, it is now a year since the Shopmobility shop moved from Lowestoft station. Their former premises are still to let.

LOWESTOFT TESCO SUPERSTORE - NEED FOR A BUS SHELTER

Suffolk County Council told us that funding for a shelter would have to come from County Councillors' locality budgets. Our Secretary has written to Simon Barnett, SCC's Senior Infrastructure Officer, to Councillor Guy McGregor and to Mr Peter Aldous MP.

We understand that site investigations revealed the need for substantial groundworks and that it was decided to make provision for a four- or five-bay shelter rather than the usual three-bay shelter. That is sensible, in view of the number of passengers who use this bus stop.

We also learn that the estimated cost has been revised from £4000 to £17000 and that a £2000 contribution has been obtained from the Gunton councillor. SCC is also preparing a bid against the Tesco Community Project Fund.

Peter Aldous MP has contacted two local councillors and offered to make a direct approach to Tesco.

BUSES TO, FROM AND IN SOUTHWOLD

Bus/train co-ordination at Halesworth deteriorated from December 2010 and the bus service from Lowestoft was roughly halved after January 2011. There are now no Sunday or Bank Holiday buses. The last bus back to Lowestoft is at 16.38; to Beccles at 16.38 and to Halesworth at 18.35. The last bus from Lowestoft to Southwold leaves at 18.31 and it only continues south of Kessingland if required.

At the end of July the experimental ban on buses in the High Street came into effect. The buses must now circumnavigate the Kings Head and call at a small shelter specially erected there, before continuing to the Pier.

On July 22nd ESTA's Chairman had a letter published in the Lowestoft Journal stating:

"On April 29th I asked a series of questions - including whether bus users had been consulted. Since then there has been a deafening silence from the group of people who advocated this ban.

"Now we are told that Suffolk County Council will decide after this summer whether the experiment has been successful; only to learn a week later (Journal July 8th) that it will last for 18 months.

"We are then told that the County Council will consult 'businesses and residents' before any ban becomes permanent. Are they not also going to consult the users of the services?

"By what criteria will the County Council decide if the experiment has been successful or not? What is the timescale for making that assessment and decision, and for public consultation?"

There has been no reply.

On August 30th our member Mrs Brenda Roberts organised a meeting in Southwold, attended by Councillor Guy MacGregor. ESTA Secretary Rod Lock also attended as did some Town Councillors and representatives of the Southwold & Reydon Society. Anglian Bus also sent a representative who said the bus ban had significantly reduced the amount of damage caused to their vehicles when negotiating the High Street.

Our Secretary pointed out that bus passengers had not been consulted about the ban and that ESTA was willing to work with other bodies to put that right. As a result there were individual offers to assist us.

Our questionnaire, enclosed with this Bulletin, is part of this process; and also seeks to address the other concerns about Southwold bus services. We have also lodged a formal objection to the experimental bus ban with the County Council.

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL TIMETABLE BOOKLETS

The booklets produced by the Council for the catchment areas of particular towns are very contain the services of the various bus operators and in that respect are very handy.

However, they no longer contain train times. We were told by an officer of the Council that this is because the bus timetables changed extensively in April and they could not afford to reprint the timetable booklets again in May when the train timetables were due to change.

We have pointed out that the National Rail timetable has no problem with periodicity. For example, 9 bus timetables are included following its Table 26. The First Great Western train timetable lists 130 connecting bus services.

Presumably the County Council can also talk to the Train Operating Company, as it obviously does with the bus operators, to see if any timetable changes are proposed...?

We have now had another letter from a different SCC officer saying there is insufficient space to include rail connecting times.

WATCH THIS SPACE...

We have taken up with National Express East Anglia problems of phone bookings for cheaper advanced fares from East Suffolk Line stations; and the fact that the VDU screens at Ipswich station no longer show arrivals. We await replies.

ESTA SPEAKING

Rod Lock gave a 15-minute talk on Ipswich Community Radio on June 29th describing ESTA's history and work. He also gave a talk to a meeting organised by Waveney Trades Union Council about the reduction in finally supported bus services since April.

ESTA is also willing to provide speakers to other meetings wherever possible.

STATION TO STATION WALKS

www.eastsuffolklinewalks.co.uk

Roger Wolfe's programme continues this autumn as follows:

Tuesday October 18th from Trimley station at 11.18, 6-mile walk to Felixstowe via Gulpher Road and Farm

Saturday October 29th from Darsham station at 10.00 for 6.25 mile walk to Saxmundham.

Saturday November 12th from Oulton Broad South at 10.35 for 9.5 mile walk to Beccles.

Saturday November 26th from Thurston station at 09.48 for 7.5 mile walk to Bury St Edmunds, ending at the Christmas Market.

The usual conditions apply. It is essential to check times and meeting arrangements a few days before each walk. The leaders reserve the right to change arrangements or cancel walks at short notice. Contact 01473 726649 or rdandswolfe.2@btinternet.com for more information.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RAIL USERS

Manchester, Saturday November 5th, organised by Railfuture. For details, log on to www.railfuture.org.uk or send SAE to ESTA's Chairman.

SANTA TRAM

In a new departure this year, the East Anglian Transport Museum at Carlton Colville will open on Saturday/Sunday November 26th/27th, December 3rd/4th and December 10th/11th.

There will be a present from Santa for each child and hot fruit punch and mince pies for the grown-ups. Admission is by pre-booked ticket only. Book on www.eatm.org.uk or phone 07759 698437. The Museum is a short walk from bus stops served by the X2 and 103.

BUNDESARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT SCHIENENPERSONENNAHVERKEHR

Who are they?

They represent regional passenger train authorities in Germany and are keen to learn from the British experience. In particular they asked Railfuture (the national voluntary body to which ESTA is affiliated) for examples of best practice in marketing, innovations and promotion of leisure traffic.

We have told them about such features as the Anglia Plus tickets, cheap advance-purchase tickets, real-time information at many stations, Roger Wolfe's station-to-station walks, provision for cycles on trains and the work of Community Rail Partnerships and users' associations such as ESTA.

However, we have also pointed out the challenges posed by, for example, lack of ticket machines at unstaffed stations and shortages of rolling stock which make it difficult (but not impossible) for train operators to cater for large events such as outdoor music festivals and airshows.

ESTA 100 CLUB winners are due to be drawn again at our Autumn Meeting. To join the Club, with the chance of a prize every quarter, send £12 payable to ESTA to our Treasurer, Alan Williams, 51 Links Way, Thurlton, Norwich, NR14 6RF

TRAVEL CANNON LTD at Saxmundham Rail Station are open Mon-Fri and can be contacted on 01728 604600. They can sell you Eurostar tickets to Lille, Paris and Brussels and onward train tickets to other Continental destinations as well as plane and ferry tickets and a wide range of other travel packages.

GRYFF COMPUTING of Fairfield Rd., Saxmundham, design this Bulletin and send it out electronically. They also offer a full range of IT services. Contact David Adams on 01728 603311 or visit www.gryff.co.uk

BLYTHWEB of Wenhaston offers a wide range of IT services. Phone Tim or Eileen Heaps on 01502 478712 or log on to www.blythweb.net

OUR WINTER BULLETIN is due to be published at the beginning of January. Please send material to Trevor Garrod editor@eastsoffolktravel.org.uk by December 10th.

STOP PRESS

BECCLES ISLAND PLATFORM

Following the work done by Chris Maddison and his helpers in the spring, further work has been done on the island platform at Beccles, to remove the weeds and bushes. The platform now looks tidier than it has done for a long time. In 14 months' time it should again be in use, following the completion of the passing loop.