

EAST SUFFOLK LINE

– a Railway for all Purposes



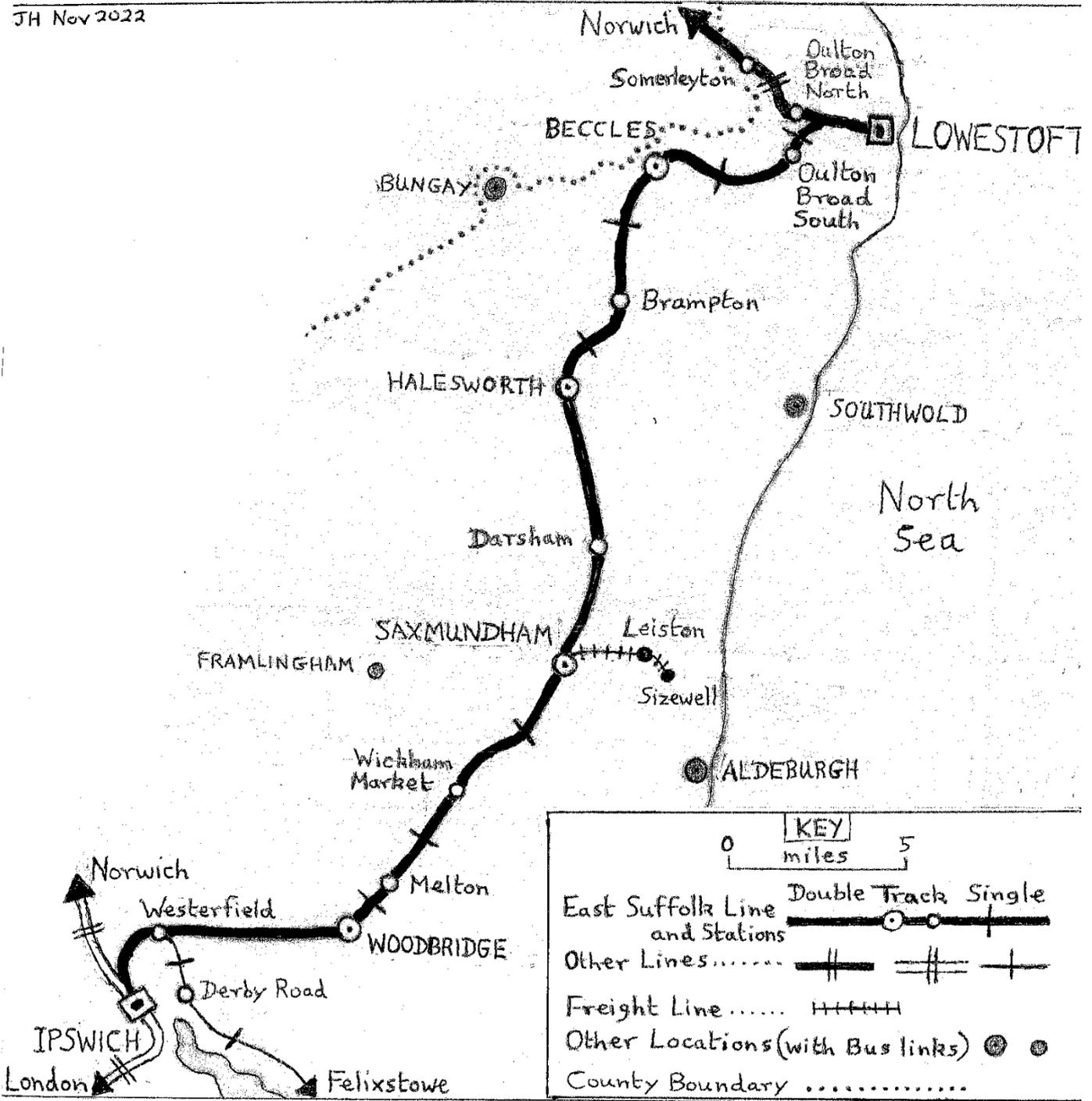
A discussion paper by the East Suffolk Travel Association



December 2022

EAST SUFFOLK LINE and CONNECTIONS 2022

JH Nov 2022



CONTENTS

Page

Map of East Suffolk Line	Inside front cover
1. What has been achieved 2012-22	1
2. What is needed 2022-32 and beyond:	3
(a) Faster trains and higher line speeds	3
(b) More capacity for population growth	5
(c) More integration of services and ticketing	11
(d) Less need to change trains	13
(e) The challenge of freight – differing needs of Felixstowe, Sizewell and Lowestoft	14
3. Executive summary and recommendations for further research	17
What is ESTA?	Inside back cover

1. What has been achieved 2012-2022

The past decade has seen great improvements for rail passengers on the East Suffolk Line between Ipswich and Lowestoft. These were reflected in an increase in passengers prior to the pandemic and a relatively good recovery since then.

December 2012 saw the opening of the passing loop at Beccles and the start of an hourly service between the two largest towns in Suffolk, initially on Mondays to Saturdays but soon also on Sundays. For Lowestoft station and nearly all others along the line it is a good marketing slogan – “A train every hour, seven days a week.”

The passengers include daily or frequent commuters, day trippers, weekenders and holidaymakers, as well as people making personal, family or business visits or travelling to and from meetings and events.

2019 saw the gradual introduction of new trains – modern bi-mode units built by Stadler in Switzerland, capable of travelling up to 100 mph and, with either

three or four carriages, able to carry more people than most of the units they replaced.

Innovation has also come in the form of the Katch electric minibuses connecting Framlingham, Snape and other destinations, on demand, to the trains at Wickham Market station (in Campsea Ashe).

Some modernisation work has also been carried out at certain level crossings to improve safety.

In March 2022 the first scheduled freight trains for many years left Lowestoft on newly refurbished track. Improved capacity north of Trimley on the Felixstowe branch had an indirect but positive effect on freight at the southern end of the East Suffolk Line. A railway for all purposes must be capable of accommodating resilient passenger and freight services.

Repurposing of station buildings has also enhanced the passenger experience – notably at Wickham Market (Station House Campsea Ashe with its café and meeting rooms), Beccles (café, meeting room and offices) and Lowestoft (station shop/visitor information point and Parcels Office exhibition space and meeting room). Further work has been carried out there by the Lowestoft Central Project and more is planned.

Meanwhile, Saxmundham station house was badly damaged by fire but has been replaced by a bungalow type building with spacious heated waiting room and is architecturally in keeping with its surroundings, while the car park and northbound platform have also been improved. It had been feared that the building would just be replaced by a basic shelter.

All this progress is encouraging and forms a basis for further improvements over the coming decade. It is important to keep improving rail services and facilities to meet the challenges of climate change.

This discussion paper aims to stimulate debate among all decision-makers towards that end. The following chapters have been written by a working group of seven ESTA members and others with detailed local knowledge.

2. What is needed 2022-32 and beyond:

a) Faster trains and higher line speeds

Introduction

The current maximum line speed on the East Suffolk Line is 55mph, a speed which would have been familiar to steam locomotive drivers a hundred years ago! The route mileage between Ipswich and Lowestoft is 49 miles and currently takes 86 minutes. An average speed of 34mph.

To reduce journey times, one needs: faster track, faster trains, signalling, and level crossings upgraded.

- **Trains** – Greater Anglia recently introduced their class 755 100mph capable trains to the line
- **Signalling** – this was upgraded in 2012 and largely meets our future needs
- **Track** - Much track has been renewed in recent times. However, speed increases have not been forthcoming. All original jointed track will need to be replaced south of Saxmundham to offer an opportunity to raise line speeds wherever possible.
- **Level Crossings (highways)** - The final constraint is level crossings. These are predominantly Automatic Open Crossings Locally monitored + Barriers (AOCL+B) which require, with a few exceptions, trains to slow to 45mph for drivers to observe and receive a white light indicating the crossing is working correctly and that the crossing is clear. Upgrading these to Automatic Half Barrier (AHB) would allow for trains to pass over at line speed; 55, 75 or 90mph.
- **Level Crossings (farm & foot)** - Higher line speeds can reduce sighting times of trains for users. These may require installation of Miniature Signal Lights to permit higher speeds.

Opportunity

Recent investment in new 100mph capable trains has not been matched by infrastructure upgrades. Rural branch lines are subsidised and rarely get the funding to upgrade but a once in a lifetime opportunity has arisen with the go-ahead to construct Sizewell C power station. As part of the planning consent construction materials should be delivered to site by rail necessitating track and level crossing upgrades. This improvement work will cause much inconvenience

to passengers and residents whilst it is done, and it is therefore only fair that the passenger sees some benefit. Whilst any power station funded improvements would be south of Saxmundham the whole line does benefit as any reduced journey times bring stations north closer to Ipswich and London.

Journey time reduction opportunity:	Distance (Miles)	LINE SPEED v TIME (mins)				
		55 (mph)	75 (mph)	Saving	90 (mph)	Saving
Ipswich to Westerfield	3					
Westerfield to Woodbridge	6	6.5	4.8	1.7	4.0	2.0
Woodbridge to Melton	2					
Melton to Saxmundham	10	11.0	8.0	3.0	6.7	3.3
Saxmundham to Halesworth	9	9.8	7.2	2.6	6.0	3.0
Halesworth to Beccles	8	8.6	6.4	2.2	5.3	2.7
Beccles to Oulton Broad S	6	6.3	4.8	1.5	4.0	2.0
Oulton Broad S to Lowestoft	2					
Total mins saved				11.0		13.0

Departure Times	55mph	75mph	90mph
Ipswich	xx17	xx17	xx17
Woodbridge	xx32	xx31	xx30
Saxmundham	xx54	xx50	xx49
Halesworth	xx10	xx03	xx02
Beccles	xx25	xx16	xx14
Oulton Broad South	xx35	xx25	xx22
Lowestoft	xx43	xx33	xx30
Total Journey Time (mins)	86	75	73

Quick Wins – Do now	
Ipswich Westerfield	Raise line speed through Westerfield station from 40mph to 50mph in Down direction and 60mph in Up direction. Improve down direction Westerfield strike-in to avoid cautionary signals
Westerfield Woodbridge	Jetty LC now MSL – extend existing 55mph to Woodbridge station.
Woodbridge Melton	Little scope for improvement here.
Melton Saxmundham	Improve Saxmundham strike-in for Chantry and Albion LCs to avoid cautionary signals
Saxmundham Halesworth	Raise line speed between Darsham and North Green from 45mph to 55mph

Quick Wins – Do now (continued)	
Halesworth Beccles	Review Up direction speed into Halesworth to raise from 15mph to 30mph Upgrade Wissett LC to MSL to permit 55mph running into Halesworth station Review 15mph for Grove and Ingate LCs. Were 25mph and now have barriers.
Beccles Oulton Broad	Review Line speed opportunity for 75mph or 90mph
Oulton Broad Lowestoft	Little scope for improvement here.
Power Station Opportunity – Don't Miss out	
Westerfield Woodbridge	Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible) between Westerfield and Woodbridge once jointed track is all renewed. Bealings LC - upgrade existing AOCL+B to AHB to match raised line speed
Melton Saxmundham	Upgrade Melton LC to permit non-stop running in down direction Raise line speed to 75mph (90 mph where possible) Ufford, Blaxhall and Beversham LCs upgrade existing AOCL+B to AHB to match raised line speed. Upgrade London end points at Saxmundham to 40mph
Longer term – Keep in mind	
Westerfield Woodbridge	Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible) between Westerfield and Woodbridge once jointed track is all renewed. Bealings LC - upgrade existing AOCL+B to AHB to match raised line speed
Melton Saxmundham	Upgrade Melton LC to permit non-stop running in down direction Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible) Ufford, Blaxhall and Beversham LCs upgrade existing AOCL+B to AHB to match raised line speed. Upgrade London end points at Saxmundham to 40mph
Saxmundham Halesworth	Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible) would require substantial track renewal and five level crossing upgrades
Halesworth Beccles	When Halesworth points are renewed replace with 40mph Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible). Some track renewal and four level crossing upgrades required
Beccles Oulton Broad	Raise line speed to 75mph (90mph where possible). Would require some track renewal
Oulton Broad Lowestoft	Little scope for improvement. Oulton Broad points to be 25mph whenever renewed.

b) More capacity for population growth

More capacity

The population of the area served by the East Suffolk Line continues to grow, both in terms of people who live and work in the area and those with second homes. We also want to see greater travel for business to boost the local economy. We need the ESL to take some of the strain from our congested road

networks and to adopt greener transport options. There are two locations which deserve immediate attention: Ipswich Garden Suburb, ideally served by Westerfield Station if there is good access from the homes to the station, and Leiston where the line to Sizewell will receive a massive investment, but will that line be suitable for subsequent passenger use?

We monitor development activity that is close to the line. There is talk of developments near Campsea Ashe (the site of Wickham Market station). Meanwhile Saxmundham, which had already grown considerably in the past two decades, has a further 800 homes proposed.

Ipswich Garden Suburb

Construction work has already started on the Ipswich Garden Suburb that will occupy the current farmland north of Colchester Road in Ipswich, bounded by Henley Road in the west and Tuddenham Road in the east, built either side of Westerfield Road, with housing to the north and the south of Westerfield station. The station will be well within the development. A total of about 4,000 houses will be built, with very little opportunity for employment on the development site, so most people will need to travel to work. If we are to avoid the congestion in Ipswich increasing even more, then it is important that excellent public transport is available as the first choice for travel.

Initial development of this extensive site has started at Henley Gate, accessed from Henley Road, unfortunately the most distant point from Westerfield Station. ESTA is working with various stakeholders to ensure that a decent footpath and cycle route is available between the new houses and Westerfield Station as soon as possible. No such footpath was in place as the first homes were moved into. ESTA is making interventions to help make suitable access available as soon as possible, so that frequent travellers recognise that Henley Gate can be a good base for their travel needs, and that all residents see use of the train as a viable transport option.

Another factor that would motivate new homeowners to use the railway is the availability of a comprehensive rail service from Westerfield. Currently few of the ESL trains stop at Westerfield. The at-best hourly service to Ipswich or Felixstowe, is unlikely to provide a car-beating service for the majority. ESTA is negotiating with Greater Anglia to improve ESL services at Westerfield as a proactive step to improve the useability of the service. Of course, we expect

that the new better performance trains would be able to shorten the journey times between Lowestoft and Ipswich.

ESTA is also very concerned about integrated public transport services. We would look for ways that new bus services between the Garden Suburb and key employment and service destinations in Ipswich can be scheduled to connect with rail services from Westerfield.

Leiston

The number of residents at Leiston continues to grow at a modest rate. The line to Sizewell passes through Leiston and the site of the closed railway station. The existing line will have to be replaced, and new level crossing equipment installed. With this level of investment, along with sufficient foresight and planning, the line could be made suitable to carry passenger trains once the construction work has finished. Reopening Leiston station is the subject for discussion, but the plan will not be determined for a long time. In the meantime, ESTA is pushing for the reworked rail infrastructure to be designed so that it would be capable of supporting passenger trains.

Increasing the frequency of trains

ESTA is keen to see an increase in the frequency of trains. With improvements to Network Rail's infrastructure, including modernised crossings, updated trackwork and speeds over points could be increased. The ambition might be for an additional hourly service from Saxmundham to Ipswich – potentially extending from Saxmundham to Leiston. That might allow for the Lowestoft trains to skip some less frequently used stations to reduce the travel time between Ipswich and Lowestoft.

Growth

The two areas of spatial development of interest in making a case for rail enhancement are the location of housing and the location of employment land for jobs. The focus of this section is on the future and enhancement of the East Suffolk Line.

The East Suffolk Local Plans retain the boundaries of the former East Suffolk and Waveney District Local Councils and the Southern area Suffolk Coastal former area was adopted in 2020 and so are very up to date.

Table 3.3 – Spatial distribution of additional housing growth to be planned for to meet residual need (including contingency)

Location	Percentage of new growth identified in this Local Plan	Approximate Number of units (rounded) (minimum)
Communities related to the A12		
Saxmundham area	18%	800
Other A12 communities	15%	667
Felixstowe (including the Trimleys)	38%	1,670
Rural Settlements	12%	528
Communities surrounding Ipswich	11%	490
Framlingham	2%	100
Leiston	2%	100
Total	98%	4,355
Total under 100% due to rounding		

Policy SCLP3.2: Settlement Hierarchy does not give preferential treatment to smaller villages with railway stations in the settlement hierarchy. While Woodbridge and Saxmundham are Market Towns where growth is planned, Wickham Market is classed as a larger village, though in reality the station

bearing the name is much closer to the small village of Campsea Ashe. Darsham is also a small village, though nearby Yoxford is a larger village. Paragraph 3.38 SCLP identifies that the Saxmundham proposal is for a garden village extension to the town (and the other such large extension is to Felixstowe). This is further expanded in Policy SCLP12.28: Strategy for Saxmundham, where the proposal map shows the 66.6 hectare space for a substantial part of the allocated 800 homes on land to the south-west of the town centre between the railway to the east and the A12 to the west. An allocation for employment land is further west on the other side of the A12. This land is too far from the station to realistically add to rail passenger traffic significantly. There is a further smaller 40 dwelling site allocated to the north-west of the town in policy SCLP12.30, this and the existing permission dating to 2018 are relatively close to the station.

The Northern former Waveney area plan dates to 2019 and so is slightly earlier in adoption but still sufficiently recent as to be regarded in date.

Geographically this plan embraces Lowestoft, Beccles and Halesworth, all significantly sized settlements where further expansion is envisaged and served by the East Suffolk Line. The next largest settlement in this plan area is Bungay, no longer on the rail network, but close enough to Beccles and Halesworth for some scope for park and ride at those stations and indeed bus/train integration there.

Table 1 - Total housing growth 2014-2036 by settlement

Settlement Total housing growth 2014-2036

Lowestoft Area (Lowestoft, Carlton Colville, Corton, Gisleham, Oulton and Oulton Broad) 5,206 56%

Beccles and Worlingham 1,458 16%

Bungay 557 6%

Halesworth and Holton 762 8%

Southwold and Reydon 387 4%

Rural areas 865 10%

Total 9,235

Paragraph 1.8 states: As of April 2017, 3,033 homes have been completed or have permission and are expected to be completed within the plan period. This gives a residual need of 5,190 new homes that need to be planned for in this Local Plan. Policy WLP1.1 makes clear that housing targets are minimums.

Paragraph 1.22 states: Employment land development (use classes B1, B2 and B8) and retail and leisure development is concentrated on the towns with a distribution reflecting the housing growth. This enables some balance between jobs and homes and retail provision. Employment land growth has been skewed towards Lowestoft and Beccles where the Employment Land Needs Assessment identified the greatest potential demand for growth. The distribution for retail growth also reflects the advice on distribution contained within the Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment. This balance will help to reduce the need to travel and therefore create more sustainable patterns of development.

It is noted that employment is often not well associated with housing location in the modern economy where specialists are often called in. However the distribution primarily on the public transport corridor does argue for the enhancement of the corridor for business use.

The focus of development on Lowestoft and Beccles does offer support to the notion that the whole of the East Suffolk Line should have frequency and speed of trains enhanced, and not just the southern part where the infrastructure works associated with Sizewell C come into play.

Policy WLP1.3 – Infrastructure identifies road improvements alone without any ambition for rail transport improvement, a major failing of this local plan, though it was found sound by an inspector and therefore aligned to central government's requirements.

Policy WLP8.21. is referenced at paragraph 1.48. This policy however does not make any ambitious requirements regarding public transport and merely requires that development be well located for walking and cycling and public transport in the general sense. The previous plan did specifically mention the Beccles loop, and as that is now in place no further ambition is expressed. To some extent this is a reflection of the local plan function. The requirement for transport statements with larger schemes would support schemes with sustainable transport provision.

c) More integration of services and ticketing

Introduction

The East Suffolk Line (ESL) provides the local railway line, for stopping services, between Ipswich and Lowestoft (and on to Norwich) for non-intercity train passengers. Such passengers often use the ESL to travel locally or as a feeder service to gain access to longer public transport journeys, starting at either Ipswich or Norwich. In addition, the ESL provides a direct link between several major settlements in East Suffolk, including Beccles, Halesworth, Saxmundham and Woodbridge. However, the catchment areas for each of the ten stations situated between Ipswich and Lowestoft would be greatly enlarged by better integrating existing and potential public transport services. For example, service buses or community transport could be scheduled with the railway timetable in order for passengers to connect their onward or return journeys accordingly. Furthermore, "Plus Bus" or other through ticketing facilities could be made available for users beginning or finishing their journey in East Suffolk.

Potential

Both Ipswich and Lowestoft have existing bus services to and from their respective railway stations. At both stations, there are bus shelters and timetables to help passengers to undertake a bus-train or train-bus journey, respectively, to or from the desired destination. For example, residents of Carlton Colville can catch a service bus to Lowestoft railway station for their onward rail journey. Alternatively, visitors to the East Anglia Transport Museum, also in Carlton Colville, can take a bus directly from Lowestoft station to the museum. Such integration enhances the potential for increased rail passenger usage by enabling convenient transfer between different forms of public transportation.

Many of the intermediary stations on the East Suffolk Line would benefit from the better integration of public transport services. Particular priorities would be enhancement and promotion of bus links to Bungay (from Beccles and/or Halesworth), Southwold (from Halesworth), Leiston and Aldeburgh (from Saxmundham) and Framlingham (by developing the Katch service from Wickham Market station).

Facilities

Physical provision of bus-rail interchange facilities at railway stations is a crucial step in enhancing the convenience of integrated journeys. Passengers should be able to leave a train and, just as with changing to a different platform, conveniently make their way to a dedicated waiting area for a service bus or community transport. Such a waiting area, or "non-rail platform", needs to be well designed and clearly signed for all types of passenger in order to provide a seamless connection between different sorts of vehicle.

As well as physical facilities, information is required to better integrate the rail - bus experience. For example, on train screens and associated announcements could provide details of onward bus or other services from the next station. Likewise, train and bus timetables, especially in digital form such as on the internet, could indicate public transport connections so that intending passengers can better plan their journey from start to finish.

In addition to the above noted sort of physical facilities at ESL stations, through ticketing could be provided for combined rail and bus journeys. This would be more convenient for intending passengers as it would avoid the need to buy separate tickets for each leg of their journey.

Stations

Stations are a key component of a well-used railway line. They are the entry points to and exit point from the train service and, as such, should provide suitable facilities for the travelling public who arrive by whatever means, including service bus, community transport, taxi, bicycle or on foot. Better integration with a train service begins and ends with the station itself. It is noted that not all East Suffolk Line stations can provide all the desirable, let alone necessary, facilities for integrated travel straightaway. ESTA carried out an audit of local stations some six years ago and an updated audit of each of the railway stations now needs to be carried out with the intention to enable the most convenient and cost-effective station facilities to be provided. This would then enable the enhancement of integrated public transport services to better serve the communities of East Suffolk. The most suitable stations could be selected as a template for integrated public transport to serve a particular catchment area.

Conclusion

Many public transport services, be they rail or bus, are enhanced by successful integration of such services between different providers and their passengers. This already occurs in many major urban areas. However, the integration of rail, bus and other public transportation in mainly rural areas, such as East Suffolk, is acknowledged to be challenging but with long term commitment can provide a first-class example of how to achieve better connected rural areas, for short and longer journeys, in a sustainable manner and as a show case for the rest of the country.

d) Less need to change trains

More through trains are needed – and not just to London.

It is very disappointing that Greater Anglia (GA) has not honoured its commitment, when bidding for the renewal of the franchise, to reinstating some through services between Lowestoft and London Liverpool Street and return. GA states there are capacity issues between Ipswich and Liverpool Street and that the reinstating of through services was not a definite commitment but one to keep under review to decide when it might be possible. ESTA urges GA to re-introduce some through services as soon as possible. It could only encourage more patronage of the East Suffolk line (ESL) and rail generally and be good for the economy of Lowestoft and east Suffolk. Indeed, when Suffolk County Council undertook a study into the case for upgrading the A12 between Lowestoft and Ipswich, employers indicated their reason for not locating in Lowestoft was not because of a slow stretch of the A12, but lack of London through train services. One way of introducing some through London services would be to attach East Suffolk Line trains to Great Eastern mainline trains at Ipswich and detach them in the return direction. This would be a relatively easy way to achieve expectations, not involving any expenditure or a huge commitment from Greater Anglia. The only alteration it might involve is some possible minor re-timing of some East Suffolk Line trains.

While not ‘technically’ through services, many Ipswich – Lowestoft services, on arrival at Lowestoft, form the next Lowestoft – Norwich (Wherry line) service and vice-versa. Often these services only involve a relatively short wait at Lowestoft. Thus, customers from some points on the East Suffolk line, such as

Halesworth and Beccles, in effect have a through service to Norwich and customers from Haddiscoe and Somerleyton have through services to Ipswich, which would be easier and quicker than changing at Ipswich or Norwich respectively. At a certain point in the journey the train information screen should change to indicate a through service to Norwich or Ipswich. In the Ipswich – Lowestoft/Norwich direction, the appropriate point might be Halesworth. In the Norwich – Lowestoft/Ipswich direction, Haddiscoe might be the appropriate point. ESTA accepts operational issues might restrict some further improvements. Nevertheless, it should be considered whether more trains could operate with that diagram and whether there could be some timetable adjustments.

e) The challenge of freight – differing needs of Felixstowe, Sizewell and Lowestoft

The situation now

The East Suffolk Line, between the triangular junctions north of Ipswich and the junction at Westerfield, is one of the busiest freight railways in the UK. On some days over 70 Felixstowe Docks container trains pass over this section, to or from terminals as far as Glasgow, Manchester and Cardiff.

At the other end of the line, commercial freight traffic has recently returned with the movement of bulk Norwegian aggregates from Lowestoft to a terminal near Stoke-on-Trent, routed via Reedham. Nuclear flask trains to and from Leiston (via the freight-only branch from Saxmundham) can still run occasionally for Sizewell B power station. There is currently no freight traffic between Saxmundham and Oulton Broad North Junction.

Future freight traffic

In prospect is the running of freight trains conveying materials for the construction by EDF of Sizewell C power station, using the East Suffolk Line from the Ipswich direction as far as Saxmundham and then using the existing freight-only branch line to Leiston – with the possibility of a temporary line being built from part way along that line directly into the construction site. One of EDF's 11 'pledges to the local community' in its document *Our*

Commitments to Britain is to 'transport 60% of construction materials by rail and sea'.

Some previous projects (such as the Channel Tunnel) have seen materials arrive by sea and then being loaded to rail for movement to site. Therefore it is possible that the rail share arriving on site could be higher than the figure of 60% may imply. It should be noted that at present there is no certainty regarding how or when Sizewell C construction trains would run. Options for enhanced signalling and some night workings will need to be considered.

ESTA's position on East Suffolk Line freight

ESTA supports the use of the East Suffolk Line for freight traffic because greater use of the line (including greater diversity of use) brings with it the possibility of investment in improved railway infrastructure. This in turn could lead to lasting benefits for the passenger service. Particularly promising in this regard is the prospect of construction trains for Sizewell C, for the simple reason that the existing line, particularly between Woodbridge and Saxmundham, has virtually no spare capacity at present and so some enhancements will need to be made.

The communities along the line, and in the area in general, will inevitably suffer disruption and noise as a result of the construction project and ESTA considers that lasting 'spin-off' benefits should be a vital part of compensating them for this. ESTA is opposed to the idea that the construction trains should only run at night. This is on the basis that noise at night should be kept to a minimum and also that capacity improvements will only be realised if additional day time train paths are required.

Potential infrastructure improvements

ESTA considers that the following should be funded as part of the Sizewell C project:

- a) Provision of additional infrastructure to assist with operational flexibility and capacity, such as loops at Wickham Market and/or Saxmundham, or even re-doubling of the line between Melton and Saxmundham;
- b) Provision of additional signalling sections to provide operational capacity and flexibility for construction trains, e.g. at Wickham Market;

- c) Upgrading of level crossings to avoid the need for trains to have to stop and then start again from a stand (in the case of freight trains, using excessive amounts of fuel and making a lot of noise in residential areas);
- d) Replacement of the remaining jointed track sections south of Saxmundham with welded rail to reduce noise as well as wear and tear on track and trains.

All of the above (some of which could be 'and/or' with each other) would have lasting benefits for the passenger service in terms of shortened journey times, improved comfort and better resilience at times of service disruption. With foresight, the items listed above could also pave the way for re-instatement of passenger trains to Leiston, with the resultant possibility of a half-hourly service from Ipswich as far as Saxmundham.

ESTA also notes that the single line section from signal CO407 on the Down East Suffolk Line on to the Felixstowe branch at Westerfield creates a bottleneck that impacts on East Suffolk Line passenger services as well as on freight trains. ESTA supports the installation of a double junction at Westerfield, with double track continuing to a point short of Spring Road viaduct. This would allow:

- a) More rapid clearance of freight trains on to the Felixstowe branch, without blocking back to East Suffolk/Boss Hall/Europa junctions as well as to Derby Road station;
- b) Raising of the existing 40mph speed restriction through Westerfield (note: there are other ways this restriction could be lifted);
- c) Reduced level crossing closure time at Westerfield;
- d) Greater service resilience for East Suffolk Line trains.

The need for 'joined-up thinking' and optimisation

Finally, ESTA hopes that railway investment decisions made in connection with Sizewell C construction and any other prospective schemes will take into account other improvements that could easily be accomplished at the same time at marginal extra cost. These include general increases in line speed, increased speeds over points, removal of Permanent Speed Restrictions if any of these exist purely for historical reasons and further upgrades to level crossings – in all cases whether or not south of Saxmundham and also whether or not directly funded by the Sizewell C project.

This will require ‘joined-up thinking’ between Network Rail, Department for Transport, Sizewell C project, local authorities and other bodies. ESTA urges such co-operation to take place in order to maximise the potential for improvements to the East Suffolk Line. It is not in ESTA’s remit to campaign for or against nuclear power, but the Sizewell C project can act as a catalyst or facilitator for such wider schemes. In addition, ESTA asks that Network Rail considers whether enhancements can be achieved at times of asset renewal, updating or change, rather than simply replacement on a ‘like for like’ basis.

Whether or not Sizewell C is built, investment is needed, from various sources, to enhance the rail infrastructure south of Saxmundham to improve line speeds for everyone.

3. Executive summary and recommendations for further research

a) The past decade has seen new and more frequent trains, refurbished and repurposed stations, upgraded signalling, extra freight and some level crossing modernisation. What about the next decade – and indeed beyond?

b) Further upgrading is needed to enable the new trains to run at the speeds of which they are capable, shaving 11 minutes or even 13 minutes off the journey time, bringing it down to 75 minutes assuming that all trains call at all stations. Whatever national infrastructure projects go ahead, the railway has a role and funding for upgrading needs to be found, from various sources that will benefit from it. Our paper analyses the upgrading that is needed, station by station. We also consider that one limited stop train a day is a reasonable aspiration.

c) The population in the East Suffolk Line’s catchment area continues to expand. Particular growth points are at Westerfield (Ipswich Garden Suburb with up to 4000 new houses) and Saxmundham (allocated 1000 more dwellings in the local plan); while there are others at Campsea Ashe, Halesworth and the Lowestoft area. ESTA is already working with stakeholders concerning Ipswich Garden Suburb. Some growth at Leiston is a longer-term project which will also enable the southern half of the East Suffolk Line to double its service frequency, which will also increase employment opportunities for local people.

d) The East Suffolk Line already caters for local and long-distance passengers, making journeys for work, business, study or leisure, and the catchment area for each of its stations can be enhanced by improved integration with existing and potential public transport services, and by PlusBus and/or other ticketing facilities. Easy transfer and user-friendly information are crucial. Consideration should be given to new bus links such as between Dales Estate, Ipswich Garden Village, Westerfield station and the hospital.

e) There is a case for some through trains between London and Lowestoft – as Greater Anglia promised in 2015 and indeed this was one reason for ordering bi-mode trains which have now been in use for well over two years. There may even be a case for two bi-modes to link at Ipswich.

f) Many journeys will also be easier if, as a general rule, East Suffolk and Wherry Line trains run through between Ipswich and Norwich, with Lowestoft timetabled as a through station, and this should be indicated by the passenger information screens.

g) The triangular junction at Ipswich has been a benefit for freight trains to and from Felixstowe. We support the use of the East Suffolk Line for freight if this strengthens the case for more investment in the infrastructure and therefore also benefits passengers.

h) It is not in ESTA's remit to argue for or against nuclear power, but the Sizewell C project should act as a catalyst or facilitator to wider schemes. Whether or not the project goes ahead, investment is needed, from various sources, to enhance the infrastructure south of Saxmundham and improve line speeds.

What is ESTA?

The East Suffolk Travel Association was formed in November 1965 by a group of people who had objected to the then proposal in the Beeching Report to close the East Suffolk Line.

The line was saved from closure, and ESTA developed into an independent voluntary body providing a voice for train and bus users. We hold regular dialogue with train and bus operators and political decision makers. Each year our members complete a month-long survey of local public transport journeys which they make, and this helps provide evidence for our campaigning.

Promoting local train and bus services has always been part of our work and in recent years we have published and distributed a popular series of “Discover” leaflets.

For 20 years ESTA has had a website www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk with news and information and links to other websites. We also issue a quarterly newsletter and maintain poster boards at all local stations.

ESTA holds three meetings a year open to the public and also organises social events for members.

It only costs £7 a year (or £21 for 4 years) to join ESTA, as an individual, family or corporate member. Apply to our Membership Secretary, 5 Digby Close, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP5 3UD.

Chairman: Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR3w2 1RQ
(chairman@eastsuffolktravel.org.uk)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the members of the ESTA Working Group who compiled this discussion paper: Trevor Garrod, Chris Green, Kevin Hilson, Stephen Poole, John Thompson, Nigel Wall and Bob Webb.

The paper was formatted by Stephen Poole, the cover photograph of a Greater Anglia Class 755 unit at Beccles was taken by John Thompson and the map was drawn by Simon Hope.

© East Suffolk Travel Association 2022