

Members' Bulletin



Issue 101
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www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk

ESTA HELPS SPONSOR WOODBRIDGE BUS.

On Thursdays and Saturdays July 19th to September 8th, an open top bus will leave Woodbridge rail station at 10.30, 11.30, 13.00, 14.00 and 15.00 for a 50-minute round trip to Sutton Hoo via the town centre, Buttrums Mill and Melton.

Our association has contributed £50 in sponsorship to this service which is being introduced by Woodbridge Town Centre Management Group and the Community Council. An all-day ticket will cost £5, child/concession £3 and family (up to five) £12. There will also be a £2 single fare (child £1).

ESTA is pleased to be associated with this innovative project and we urge members to use it. Further information can be obtained from Woodbridge Tourist Information Centre at the rail station (T: 01394 382240)

AUTUMN MEETING:

Our autumn meeting will be on Saturday 6th October at 2.00pm in the Church Hall, next to St. Andrew's Church, Melton. The church is in the centre of the village, only a few minutes' walk from the station. The Wilford Bridge pub, next to the river in the opposite direction from the station, does good meals. After reports and discussion of campaigns and public transport issues we shall welcome as guest speaker Mr. Clive Morris, Rural Services Manager of the train operator "One".

FELIXSTOWE MEETING:

ESTA Felixstowe will have a meeting on Tuesday October 16th at 7.30pm in St. Andrew's Hall, St. Andrew's Rd, Felixstowe, a short walk from the rail station. Guest speaker will be Mr. John Wilson, who recently retired from his post as Route Enhancement Director of Network Rail. The 16.58 train from Lowestoft, with a change at Westerfield, will get you to Felixstowe at 18.52. A lift can be arranged for four members back to Woodbridge but you must let Rod Lock know in advance if you would like to do this. Otherwise, you would need to catch the 20.56 train from Felixstowe. Another alternative would be to share a taxi back to Woodbridge

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RAIL USERS

takes place this year on Saturday November 3rd at the Maltings, Ely - 10 minutes' walk from the station.

It is organised by the Railway Development Society (Railfuture) to which ESTA is affiliated, and is an ideal opportunity to meet like-minded campaigners and hear rail industry speakers. It costs £12.50 (£10 for Railfuture members) plus £9.50 for optional buffet lunch. Send bookings to Peter Wakefield, 7 Hollymount, Cambridge, CB1 1QD. More information on the website www.railfuture.org.uk

ESTA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The meeting room of the Halesworth URC Church was full for our Annual General Meeting on May 26th, when we welcomed as guest speaker Mr. John Gummer MP (Conservative, Suffolk Coastal).

Mr. Gummer began by paying tribute to the work done by ESTA over many years in pressing to retain and improve local train and bus services.

There had been changes over the past decade in the context of public transport campaigning, however. Climate change had brought the public transport issue more centre stage. Unnecessary use of energy was now being recognised as an issue to be tackled and transport was “not the most important, but an important, use of energy.

Public transport had to be made as convenient as possible. Costs and benefits needed to be treated on a more sensible basis. “How do we measure carbon saving?” asked our speaker. “The Government needs to put proper figures on what it saves to get a person out of their car and into a train or bus. We need a rational, scientific approach.”

Mr. Gummer said that it was important to get the best out of what we already had, and he commended ESTA’s work on station car-parking, Beccles loop and Lowestoft station. Improved management had helped the East Suffolk Line become more attractive. It was important to write letters to transport operators; and to County Councillors who were having to cope with very difficult budget pressures.

However, it was also important to monitor services, for an empty double decker bus running around was not necessarily the best use of resources. People needed “as useful a bus service as possible” rather than “as many buses as possible”. It might be necessary to take a vehicle off one service and put it on another for which supply did not match demand.

We must also consider why people drove cars. Inconvenient public transport need not be the main or only reason. There were also psychological reasons - such as privacy, safety and listening to one’s own music. Mr. Gummer described a recent demonstration of ultra-lightweight guided vehicles which he had watched at Heathrow Airport. There could be a role for such a system in Ipswich, linked to a park-and-ride site.

Our speaker answered many questions from members. Commenting on the Felixstowe line, he urged that it be electrified, which would increase it’s capacity and make it more popular with line-side residents. Improvements to the rail links between the Haven Ports (Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich) and the Midlands and North West were also essential.

The costs of train and air travel needed to be re-examined on journeys such as London to Manchester. For example, should airline travel on such routes be taxed and rail services be made cheaper? Mr. Gummer drew attention to the TGV-Est (high speed line from Paris to Strasbourg) about to be opened in France and asked, “Why are we so bad at great public works in Britain?”

Mr. Gummer pointed out that private enterprise wanted to build a Central Railway from the London area to the Midlands and North and suggested that such a scheme was worth serious consideration. Another possibility was to upgrade one railway to be a showcase of excellence to demonstrate what rail could achieve.

In the business part of the AGM, the Chairman, Trevor Garrod, presented his Annual Report, showing how ESTA had measured up to its tasks of providing a voice for local train and bus users and encouraging more use of public transport.

Some of the issues which we had taken up may have seemed mundane, but they were very significant to the passenger, or potential passenger, looking for an easy and attractive journey. Such issues included connections between Ipswich and Norwich trains at Lowestoft and the provision of more bus shelters. Larger issues had included opposing the suggestion to re-site Lowestoft station and commenting on the Greater Anglia Route Utilisation Strategy.

Mr. Garrod thanked all members who had supported the association's work during the year 2006-7.

The Treasurer, Alan Williams, presented a balance sheet showing total income of £2406.44 and expenditure of £2095.48, giving an excess of income over expenditure of £310.96. Total bank balances on April 5th were £2692.16, of which some £650 was already earmarked for 100 Club prizes or specific projects.

The reports were accepted and the following were elected for 2007-8:

Chairman - Trevor Garrod (Lowestoft); Vice-Chairman - Peter Cannon (Leiston); Secretary - Rod Lock (Oulton Broad); Treasurer & Membership Secretary - Alan Williams (Thurlton); Publicity Officer - Vanessa Gregory (Woodbridge); Press Officer - Helen Armstrong (Framlingham); Committee - Albert Godfrey (Oulton Broad); Brenda Roberts (Wenhaston); Chris Boon (Oulton Broad); John Brodribb (Beccles); Val Pizzey (Wickham Market); Benita Jackson (Halesworth); Margaret Swanenburg (Benhall Green); David Adams (Saxmundham); Shiona Hardie (Woodbridge). Councillor Ken Howe has also been appointed to represent Saxmundham Town Council. The Council's previous representative, Mr. Richard Smith, did not seek re-election, and tribute was paid to the important contribution he had made to ESTA's work while serving on our committee.

Our constitution allows us to co-opt up to three further members to the committee during the next twelve months. If YOU are interested in serving - perhaps because you feel your area is under-represented - please contact our Secretary. Committee meetings are held in Saxmundham, to fit in with train times, on the last Wednesday evening of July, September, November, January, March and May.

REVISION OF EVENING X1 BUS

One of our members, a theatregoer, suggested that the X1 coach which leaves Norwich at 23.20 for the James Paget Hospital should be extended to Lowestoft. Our Secretary wrote to Philip Seago, First Eastern Counties' Commercial & Operations Director, who initially said this could not be done because of shift patterns.

We are, however, pleased to report that a way has been found of extending the service and since May 27th it has been continuing to Lowestoft Bus Station, where it arrives at 00.27. This also enables Lowestoft people to have a late night out in Yarmouth.

This late bus runs seven days a week.

HOW WERE TRAINS AND BUSES IN APRIL?

This year's ESTA Survey endeavoured to provide a snapshot of the good and bad aspects of our local public transport services during the month of April.

Thank you to all those members who, between them, answered questions on 39 bus trips and 47 train journeys which they made locally. The lucky winner of a draw of all the entries, made at the AGM, was Mrs. D C Brown of Woodbridge.

The questionnaires were carefully and thoroughly analysed by Rod Lock, who concludes as follows:

TRAIN punctuality was very good, maintaining the trend evident in the previous survey, in August 2006. 51% of trains arrived on time, 28% were late (7.5 minutes on average) and 21% arrived early.

67% of our members' journeys in April were for leisure purposes and the remainder for business.

For the first time we asked for detailed information about how train times were obtained. 62% consulted a timetable and 9% visited a website. 7% mentioned the East Suffolk Line Guide while, interestingly, 9% said they already knew the times having previously used the service.

88% of members said their fares were collected or tickets inspected on the train, 47% said they would have used train catering facilities if these had been available.

The issue of car parking at stations, notably at Wickham Market and Darsham, was frequently cited as a problem. At Oulton Broad South it was pointed out that the limited car parking available could be depressing rail usage.

As in previous years, the on-board service provided by conductor guards was highly praised and criticism of lack of on-train announcements has largely evaporated.

The results of previous years' surveys were also repeated when members were asked what would encourage them to use the trains more often. An hourly service between Ipswich and Lowestoft was high on their list of demands as was the need for passenger lifts when having to change at Ipswich.

BUS punctuality showed a considerable improvement over the August 2006 figures, albeit with services running on less congested roads than in the peak summer period. 64% of respondents obtained bus times from a timetable and 28% consulted Traveline. Only 5% of journeys were for business purposes

There has been criticism in the past that some smaller independent operators were not displaying route numbers or destinations on their buses. Our new survey showed a good response under this heading, however.

As in previous surveys, customer care ratings were again very high but 29% criticised bus stop facilities because of litter, absence of timetables or lack of shelters.

Some responses called for family group tickets on the buses. We believe this is worth examining but should be accompanied by a form of family buscard, similar to the railcard, to avoid abuse.

Meanwhile, inadequate seating at Lowestoft bus station and connections between the 99 and 521 buses at Southwold remain unresolved issues.

100 CLUB

This continues to be a useful generator of income for our association and the prizes were recently increased slightly. Any member can join - please contact our Treasurer. Prizewinners in the draw made at the AGM were Bryan Hall, Val Pizzey, R.J. Linsell and Alan Holloway.

POSTERS:

Our committee member Shiona Hardie has designed two A4 posters to advertise ESTA and it is hoped to have these available by the end of July. If you can display one or two, please contact our Secretary. One of the posters is aimed particularly at young people and it is hoped to display copies in schools and colleges and youth clubs from September.

LEAFLETS:

ESTA's standard recruitment leaflet has been updated. You should find enclosed with this bulletin a copy which you can pass to a potential new member.

TRAVEL CANNON LTD. on Saxmundham station can provide your British and international rail tickets and all other travel agency services. Contact Peter and Mary on 01728 604600 Monday - Friday and Saturday morning.

GRYFF COMPUTING of Saxmundham designs this bulletin and sends it electronically to a growing number of people. They deal with both Mac and PC for repairs and upgrades, and also full internet services. Contact David Adams on 01728 603311 or visit the website: www.gryff.co.uk

BLYTHWEB LTD of Wenhaston maintains the ESTA website and also offers IT and printing services, computer building, upgrading and repairing as well as website design and hosting. Phone Tim and Eileen Heaps on 01502 478712 or visit their website on www.blythweb.net or e-mail them at tim@blythweb.net or eileen@blythweb.net

SHOPMOBILITY on Lowestoft Station now has revised opening hours: Monday 08.15 to 13.00; Tuesday to Thursday 08.15 to 15.00; Friday and Saturday 08.15 to 16.00. It is closed for lunch 13.00 to 13.30. It hires out manual and powered wheelchairs and scooters as well as selling newspapers, sweets, hot and cold drinks, ice-creams, secondhand books and providing a photocopying service. Tel; 01502 588857.

BUS/TRAIN LEAFLETS: Vanessa Gregory has compiled a leaflet which is being published and distributed by the Wickham Market Resource Centre. John Brodribb is producing the second edition of a similar leaflet for Beccles.

AN FEC NETWORK TICKET gives unlimited travel for one day on all First Eastern Counties buses for £10.00 (children £6.50; family of four £20.00). Buy it from the driver.

AN ANGLIA PLUS rail ticket, valid as far west as Cambridge, costs £12 for the day (not valid before 08.45 Mon-Fri) or £24 for 3 days. Up to four accompanied children travel for £2 each.

ESTA STALLS are run partly to promote facilities such as these and partly to tell the public about our work. Thank you to those members who manned a successful stall in Saxmundham on April 21st. Southwold Trinity Fair was cancelled because of bad weather but may be re-arranged. If you can help with stalls at Brook Farm, Saxmundham on July 21st, East Anglian Transport Museum on September 8th / 9th and Ipswich Transport Museum on October 7th, please contact Rod Lock.

IF THIS IS A QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP...

... one wonders what a “non-quality bus partnership” would be like...

On page 3 we reported a welcome improvement in the late night X1 coach service to Lowestoft. However, local bus service changes from May 27th have left Oulton Broad and the Beccles Road area with no Sunday, Bank Holiday or evening buses, while Pakefield no longer has a bus to Morrisons supermarket, Kessingland or Southwold. The 608/9 service has been withdrawn while the 99 takes longer as it is now diverted via Long Road.

These changes apparently result from a “Quality Bus Partnership” between Suffolk County Council, Waveney District Council and First Eastern Counties, in which the councils have invested in “infrastructure”. That is presumably why two bus stop signs are attached to lamp-posts in Bloodmoor Road (where there are no houses) and passengers have to change buses there if they want to go from Kessingland to Beccles or Norwich.

Buses to and from the south do now call at Lowestoft rail station - but the stops, like many others in the town centre, have no timetables on them or even an indication of which services call there.

Our member Jim Jordan had a letter published in the Lowestoft Journal on 1.6.2007 criticising the changes; and our Chairman also wrote to the press urging, “Let us see these partners spending a small amount of money to put right these shortcomings and admitting that in, for example, depriving the centre of Oulton Broad of an evening and Sunday bus service, they may have made a mistake.”

The ESTA AGM also discussed the changes and passed a resolution (sent to all relevant bodies) stating, “in view of the widespread disapproval of service changes, both supported and commercial, being introduced in the Lowestoft and Suffolk Coastal area, we wish to see, under the Freedom of Information Act, details of the market research and consultation, by both the councils and operators, on which these changes are based.”

LOWESTOFT RAIL STATION MOVE PROPOSAL:

In common with the many other objectors, we have been informed that a “revised Area Action Plan” will be prepared and submitted to the Secretary of State in October. There will then be a further chance to comment at an Examination before an Inspector in April 2008.

Meanwhile, ESTA has been shown a passenger survey form drafted by the statutory organisation Passenger Focus and we have made comments - mainly on how it could be shortened and focussed.

We understand that the 1st East official who suggested a road train or water taxi has now left 1st East “by mutual consent”.

EAST ANGLIA TRANSPORT MUSEUM:

ESTA has sent a further letter of support to the museum which is applying for Heritage Lottery Fund money to expand its facilities. We draw particular attention to the value of the museum in attracting visitors to the area and the opportunities to increase the use of sustainable transport.

GREATER ANGLIA ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY: Following discussion in committee, our Secretary will be submitting detailed comments on this document in early July. Please send a SAE if you would like a copy.

NEXT BULLETIN: Please send items to Trevor Garrod (trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk) by September 10th.