

ESTA



NEWS

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EAST SUFFOLK LINE – A RAILWAY FOR ALL PURPOSES

This is the title of an 18-page discussion paper being launched by ESTA on 6th December to mark the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of a passing loop at Beccles and introduction of an hourly service between Ipswich and Lowestoft.

This and other improvements (such as a fleet of new trains in 2019) led to an increase in passengers including 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.

Our discussion paper aims to stimulate debate among all decision-makers about the development of the line over the next decade and beyond, to cater for a growing population and to meet the challenges of climate change.

In particular we examine how to reduce end-to-end journey time; cater for increased population such as at Ipswich Garden Suburb and Saxmundham; better integration with other public transport services; enhanced ticketing and information; the case for some through services to and from London and as a general rule running through trains between Ipswich and Norwich via Lowestoft. Our paper also examines the challenge of freight and the differing needs of Felixstowe, Sizewell and Lowestoft.

We show how it should be possible, with the modern Stadler trains, to cover the Ipswich – Lowestoft journey in 75 minutes. Sometimes this is by “quick wins” by raising line speed on certain sections, and in other cases it would mean upgrading certain level crossings.

Our paper is available in print from our Chairman, and digitally, including on our website. We look forward to lively constructive debate in the coming months and to detailed research. That is why the executive summary at the end of the paper also forms a set of “recommendations for further research”

OVER A HUNDRED RESPONSES TO TRAIN AND BUS SURVEY

Thank you to everyone who completed one or more of our survey forms about a local public transport journey which they made during the month of October. Our President received 127 (almost the same number as last year) and has been busy analysing these. 81 of them report on train journeys and 46 on bus journeys. We shall issue a report after Christmas.

The report will then be sent to relevant politicians and operators, and of course to the news media, and be accessible via our website.

ESTA CHRISTMAS LUNCH takes place on December 10th at the Coach & Horses, Melton. Bookings closed on November 24th and we look forward to a relaxing and enjoyable event. Thank you especially to David Smith for organising it this year.

ESTA SPRING MEETING

This will take place on Saturday March 4th in St Mary’s Church, Halesworth, starting at 14.00. We shall welcome as guest speaker Mr Alan Neville, Customer & Community Engagement Manager of Greater Anglia. There will also be updates and discussion on bus issues.

St Mary’s is the Parish Church in the centre of Halesworth. You can see its tower ahead of you when you leave the railway station or the Saxons Way bus shelter. The church now hosts public events as well as services, rather than the church hall which is currently used for other purposes. Tea/coffee should be available. Toilets and car parking are nearby.

Halesworth’s pedestrianised Thoroughfare has an attractive range of independent shops, eating and drinking establishments.

Further meetings as planned as follows:

- Committee meeting – Wednesday January 11th in the evening.
- Annual General Meeting Saturday May 20th at Oulton Broad
- Summer buffet, preceded by short committee meeting – Wednesday July 12th
- Autumn meeting in Aldeburgh or Leiston – Saturday October 14th

Full details will be in our next ESTA NEWS and announced on our website.

BUS FOCUS AT OUR SAXMUNDHAM MEETING

The main topic at ESTA’s autumn meeting was on the future of local buses, when 40 people gathered in Saxmundham Market Hall. Two Suffolk County Councillors and a senior officer addressed the meeting and formed a panel to deal with comments and questions.

Councillor Richard Smith, Cabinet Member for Transport, said that the authority had “no spare funds” to support new bus services but would do its best to support what was already there. Bus patronage was still considerably below pre-pandemic levels.

The Council had produced a Bus Service Improvement Plan, as required by the Government, but – in common with 40 other authorities – had not received any extra funding to implement it.

His colleague, Councillor Alexander Nicoll, drew attention to the recent report on transport by Transport East, and to other possible sources of transport funding, and the work of the Public Transport Consortium of which he is National Chair.

Mr Simon Barnett explained the County Council’s transport remit and the Enhanced Partnership which he headed. The Council could not tell operators what to do but it could bid for Department for Transport funding for improvements.

Members raised many issues, including the transport of workers to the Sizewell C site if that project goes ahead. We were told that any extra bus services for the works would probably not be for the general public. SCC was pressing for the vehicles to be electric or hydrogen powered.

The question of delays to buses because of roadworks was also raised and there were calls for a stricter system when utility companies wanted to dig up roads. There was a call for a mechanism for funding highway improvements to help public transport.

On bus shelters, Mr Barnett said that these could be funded by anybody. The design could take a while. It had recently taken three years to install island refuges in the Woodbridge area. Campaigners were advised to seek funding for such measures through Neighbourhood Plans. Another potential source was County Councillors’ locality budgets.

One example of an improvement (and transport integration) was the recent installation of a cycle rack behind the bus shelter in Pettistree. On the other hand, Greater Anglia had banned National Express buses from the station forecourt at Ipswich.

Thanks were expressed to Messrs Smith, Nicoll and Barnett for giving up their Saturday afternoon to take part in our meeting, and we look forward to ongoing dialogue with them and their colleagues.

BorderBus service 522 was revised in September and now has only one daily trip to Peasenhall (now running as 522A) but instead more to Halesworth, where it terminates by the Water Tower, also passing over Norwich Rd bridge, near the station. Kelsale, Darsham and Bramfield now also benefit from this revised service, Monday to Friday. Information: www.Border-Bus.co.uk

BY BUS TO MARTHAM?

This article by Trevor Garrod first appeared in the newsletter of our sister organisation, the East Norfolk Transport Users’ Association (www.entua.org.uk). It is slightly abridged.

At Lowestoft bus station we constantly see double decker buses with “Martham” on the front.

To my shame, I had never been to this Norfolk village by bus – indeed, I only once recall, as a teenager, cycling through it. My only other connection with Martham was that my maternal grandmother had been born there in 1895.

It was time to put this matter right and so on a wet autumn Sunday I caught the hourly “Coastal Clipper” (services 1 and 1A) for a journey of just under 20 miles. On weekdays the service is half hourly.

I was very familiar with the journey through Corton, Hopton and Gorleston; noted progress on the Great Yarmouth Third Crossing (one span of which is now in position over Southtown Road) but the trip north along the straight wide Caister Road is one I make less often.

Caister, Ormesby and Hemsby are villages which have expanded over the past 50 years but which still have some areas of open country in between, and are fortunate to have a frequent bus service.

Winterton, dominated by its tall slim church tower (like so many on our east coast a landmark for mariners) is a peaceful village with views across the Broads National Park to the north. The country road turns inland towards Martham, a substantial village of 3,500 with picturesque cottages around a large green and, in the background, a church tower with a small steeple.

Martham has a number of shops, a cafe and a cosy pub, the King’s Arms, serving Adnams (among other ales) and home-cooked meals. There is a large wooden bus shelter (with no seats) and next to it are bus stop flags but no timetable for the Coastal Clipper and only a generic Norfolk County Council notice and a timetable for the local Our Bus service.

First Eastern Counties publishes an attractive timetable for services 1/1A (both of which terminate in Martham) also giving ideas for exploring the area. Obviously, these buses are important for commuters into Great Yarmouth and for holidaymakers, but in good weather they also tempt us to explore coast and countryside. The timetable leaflet tempts you to take a walk across the fields to Caister Castle or along the coast path and famous Winterton Dunes.

Ideas for a spring or summer day?

Note: “Coastal Clipper” is also the brand name covering the service 99 from Southwold to Lowestoft and you can buy a Coastal Zone ticket covering all of the 99 and 1/1A routes.

If coming to Lowestoft by train, you normally have a 5-minute walk to the bus station if going towards Great Yarmouth.

NORWICH – LIVERPOOL TRAINS

From Lowestoft, Beccles and Halesworth it is often handy to use the Norwich – Liverpool service to reach the Midlands and the North. It is also important for visitors from those regions who want to travel by rail to this part of Suffolk.

Over a number of years there have been mutterings about cutting the service in two. We therefore welcome the news, sent to us by the Peterborough & Norwich Rail Users’ Group, that the through Norwich – Liverpool service (via Peterborough, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester) will be retained until at least December 2023. The Franchising Director’s proposal to cut these popular trains is “off the table for the moment.”

Let’s keep up the pressure to ensure that it stays off the table!

RENEWING TRACK IN THE WOODBRIDGE AREA

Network Rail states that some of the track in the Woodbridge area is 100 years old. It needs renewing and this will be done over 8 weekends between December 10th and February 12th. A further period of engineering work will take place at the end of March.

Each time there will be replacement buses between Ipswich and Saxmundham.

ESTA's Chairman was interviewed about this by BBC Radio Suffolk on November 16th. He said that investment to renew the line was welcome, in principle, as it should lead to a smoother ride and better line speeds. In the meantime, the replacement buses must be well organised to minimise disruption and delay.

WESTERFIELD STATION AND IPSWICH GARDEN VILLAGE

In ESTA NEWS 162 we referred to start of work on this housing development – initially in the part furthest from Westerfield station.

Our paper EAST SUFFOLK LINE – A RAILWAY FOR ALL PURPOSES put the case for steps to improve the useability of the service” at Westerfield station and for a footpath and cycle route between the new houses and the station as soon as possible.

Our committee member Nigel Wall, who lives in north Ipswich, has had correspondence with his MP, Tom Hunt, on these issues.

In our discussion paper A RAILWAY FOR ALL PURPOSES we also moot the idea of a bus service from Dales Estate via Ipswich Garden Village and Westerfield station to Ipswich Hospital, which could open up a number of journey opportunities.

LOWESTOFT STATION BUILDING: In the last ESTA NEWS we also reported on the proposals unveiled in late August for an extension to the currently disused building at the eastern end of the station concourse. ESTA responded to the public consultation. On contacting East Suffolk Council again in October we were told that they had received many comments and were “still reviewing” them all.

25 YEARS OF TOURISM INITIATIVES IN HALESWORTH

ESTA has worked with the Halesworth Tourism Group (HTG) for several years and so I was pleased to attend their anniversary gathering on November 9th.

Members of the Group and representatives of local councils and businesses filled the Stables at the historic Angel Hotel to hear about the start of initiatives to promote the town in 1997 – initially with financial support from the EU and local authorities; and the formal establishment of Halesworth Tourism Group in 2008.

HTG has published or contributed to many leaflets and brochures over the years, including part funding of the ESTA “Discover the Blyth Valley” leaflet.

I came away confident that efforts to attract visitors to Halesworth – one of four attractive market towns along our line - will continue over the next 25 years.

PROGRESS BY LITTLE RAILWAYS

In ESTA NEWS 149 and 151 we reported on developments on heritage lines in our area. These have the potential to bring in visitors, and to do so by public transport.

Leiston Works Railway

Members have been at work extending the track almost to the junction with Buller Road. Their long-term goal is to link with the currently freight-only branch line at Leiston station. Extending track across the road will be a challenge – but it has been done, for example, at Sheringham.

Information: www.lwr.org

Halesworth to Southwold Narrow Gauge Railway Society

The Members' Meeting on November 12th in Blythburgh Village Hall gave some 25 attendees the chance to see the work that has been done in rebuilding Blythburgh station and refurbishing the former goods shed. You can also get a good view from the A12, including from the 99A bus.

Information: www.halesworthtosouthwoldrailway.co.uk

Southwold Railway Trust

You can catch a bus to Southwold, alight at the Blyth Hotel and walk down Blyth Road to the Steamworks Site, alongside the former Southwold Railway track. There is some interesting narrow gauge rolling stock, including now a replica steam locomotive. Information about membership and next year's opening dates: www.southwoldrailway.co.uk

East Anglia Transport Museum

The extension of the 2-ft gauge East Suffolk Light Railway has now been in use for two seasons and 2022 has been a particularly busy year. Visitors can also ride on a variety of trams and trolleybuses and view many static exhibits.

On December 3rd/4th, 10th/11th and 17th/18th the museum will be open for its "Ride the Lights" seasonal celebrations and again on New Year's Day; after which it will reopen in the spring.

You can get there on bus services X2, X21, X22 and 146

Information: www.eatransportmuseum.co.uk

ESTA PEOPLE

Thank you to our members Alan Williams, Louise Gooch, Kevin Hilson, John and Sue Gordon for erecting, looking after and dismantling the ESTA stall at the East Anglia Transport Museum Trolleybus event at the end of September.

Thank you for the members of our working group who compiled our discussion paper A RAILWAY FOR ALL PURPOSES: Stephen Poole, Nigel Wall, John Thompson, Kevin Hilson, Chris Green, Bob Webb and Simon Hope.

Sandra Gage has stood down from the ESTA committee because of pressure of other commitments. Her local government experience has been very valuable to the association and she was the moving force before the creation of our new logo which – unlike the old one – makes it clear that ESTA is concerned with users of both trains and buses.

The ESTA 100 Club winners were drawn at our October 15th meeting.

They are: 1st – Susan & James Gibbons; 2nd Eve Hostettler; 3rd Robin Price; 4th Mike Hill and 5th Alison Cackett.

The next draw will be at our Christmas lunch on December 10th.

You can join in the 100 Club, provided that you are an ESTA member, by sending a cheque (payable to ESTA) for £12 to our Secretary. There are 4 draws per year.

MEETING PEOPLE

On October 19th, Trevor Garrod, Alan Williams, Kevin Hilson and John Thompson had a meeting with Alan Neville, Greater Anglia's Customer & Community Engagement Manager for a wide-ranging discussion. We covered issues such as timetables, ticketing, bicycles on trains, on-train announcements and instances of anti-social behaviour.

We also updated Mr Neville on the work at Ipswich Garden Village and he recommended officers at Network Rail and Suffolk County Council who could also be involved. Station car parking, especially at Beccles, was also discussed.

On November 12th Trevor Garrod met Peter Aldous MP at his constituency surgery to discuss both rail and bus issues – some of which are covered elsewhere in this ESTA NEWS.

FEEDBACK ON YOUR TRAIN AND BUS JOURNEYS

Comments on experiences during specific local journeys – apart from those made in our October survey – can also be given on the Feedback page of the ESTA website. www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk

IT'S HAPPENING ON LOWESTOFT STATION

On Saturday December 17th the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership will hold a Christmas Fayre in the Parcels Office Public Exhibition Space and nearby concourse. As well as all the stalls, there will be music and, in the latter part of the afternoon, a carol concert.

The station shop and visitor information point is normally open from 10.00 till 15.00 or till 13.00 on Thursdays. People who come inside are often surprised at the range of goods on offer.

MEANWHILE AT BECCLES, WICKHAM MARKET (Campsea Ashe), MELTON AND WOODBRIDGE there are also refreshments. Indeed, about the only station on our line with no cafe or pub within easy reach is Brampton.

As this December marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of Beccles loop, here are two photos recently taken by John Thompson. They show the southbound platform which was refurbished in 2012 after nearly three decades out of use.



Best wishes to all our members for Christmas and the New Year.

Material for our spring edition should reach Trevor Garrod by mid-February.