

ESTA



News

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Chairman: Trevor Garrod

15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ t 01502-581721

Secretary: Rod Lock

The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 3AW t 01502-511715

Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Alan Williams

51 Links Way, Thurlton, Norfolk NR14 6RF

www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk

UPBEAT ESTA MEETING AT BECCLES

The Arthur Crisp Studio in the refurbished Beccles Station was full for the ESTA public meeting on Saturday February 18th.

It was two years since Councillor Graham Elliott had given our meeting at another venue in the town a presentation on the plans for a cafe, meeting rooms and business facilities in the historic building; and so it was fitting that he should now give a report on what had been achieved and how it had been done.

He paid tribute to everyone who had worked together to regenerate the building which was now "a welcoming gateway to the town", with three out of four upstairs offices fully occupied and a variety of different organisations meeting in the large Arthur Crisp Studio or the smaller Ticket Office. The cafe was run as a social enterprise, Beccles Station Enterprises, with a mixture of paid staff and volunteers.

The installation of a serving hatch overlooking the grass area, and CCTV, had reduced the danger of vandalism; while the placing of a real-time information screen in the cafe provided another very useful facility.

Projects still to be done included a taxi hotline for when the cafe was closed; improved drainage and a new shelter on the Lowestoft-bound platform; and making the busy crossroads on the approach to the station safer for pedestrians.

Our second speaker, Mr James Steward, Area Customer Services Manager for Greater Anglia, looked forward to the introduction in 2019 of the fleet of new trains that would "transform the region's services.", with all local trains formed of at least three coaches. These would be hybrid units, running on diesel power from Lowestoft to Ipswich but then able to continue, under the wires, electrically powered, from there to London. Four through workings a day were envisaged to the capital.

However, Mr Steward added, ""We're not going to do nothing for the next two years as we wait for the new trains." For the class 170 2-car and 3-car diesel trains that formed many local services, a programme of heavy overhaul had just started.

New-style ticket vending machines would be introduced, with Beccles due to have one "in the next few months" and soon it would be possible to use a contactless bank card to pay for a ticket. "Totems" would be installed on platforms, combining CCTV, a help point, interactive screen and better information at times of engineering work.

With new trains in 2019/20, the journey time from Ipswich to London could be reduced to 61 minutes for most of the day and there would be an hourly Ipswich - Peterborough service, with many trains starting and finishing at Colchester.

In answer to questions, our speaker said that the current diesel trains would go back to the leasing company when they were withdrawn, and could well then get used in other parts of the country - so could the 2-car class 156 trains including the one named "ESTA 1965-2015" spend its remaining years in Wales or the West Country?

Because of the current shortage of diesel units, the "short set" comprising three coaches with a diesel locomotive at either end was expected to continue in use on the Norwich - Lowestoft/Yarmouth lines until 2019. Mr Steward stressed that local trains would still have conductor-guards to sell and check tickets and assist passengers.

ESTA's Chairman thanked the speakers and everyone who had contributed to the meeting, including Cathy Aukland and her colleagues in the cafe who provided afternoon refreshments.

IT WILL SOON BE AGM TIME

This year's Annual General Meeting of ESTA will be held in St Mary's Church Hall, Halesworth, starting at 14.00 on Saturday May 13th. The hall is to the southwest of the Parish Church. Walk through or round the churchyard, bearing right, and the hall is a modern building to the left.

We shall be pleased to welcome as guest speaker Mr Steve Royal, Operations manager of Anglian Bus. The company runs the important inter-urban route from Norwich via Bungay to Halesworth and then on to Southwold as well as sponsored services from Southwold to Beccles and Halesworth to Beccles, plus the service 61 along the coast from Yarmouth to Lowestoft and Kessingland.

Anglian Bus service 88 also interchanges with Great Anglia's trains at Halesworth and is ideal for exploring the attractive Blyth Valley.

It is also hoped to have a speaker from the Southwold Railway Trust to update us on their work.

The agenda for the business part of the AGM will be:

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence.
2. Minutes of 2016 AGM (held at Saxmundham) and Matters Arising.
3. Annual Report.
4. Financial Report.
5. Hon. Auditor's Report
6. Election of officers and committee (Nominations with name of proposer and seconder must be given in writing to the Chairman or Secretary before the start of the meeting.)
7. Appointment of Hon. Auditor and (optional) President and Vice-President.
8. Any motions on policy or organisation (to be submitted in writing, with names of proposer and seconder) before the meeting.
9. Discussion and announcements of future activities.

"DISCOVER THE BLYTH VALLEY"

The 2017 edition of this popular leaflet will be available at the meeting. It promotes the bus service between Halesworth and Southwold, together with the rail link at Halesworth.

Funding for the leaflet this year has come from Anglian Bus, the Halesworth & Blyth Valley Partnership, Southwold Railway Trust, Halesworth Tourism Group and, of course, ESTA. It will be available from many local outlets from the beginning of April. If you would like a copy and/or can help distribute them, please contact ESTA's Chairman.

145 RESPONSES TO ESTA'S TRAIN AND BUS SURVEY

Thank you to all members who responded to our November survey, reporting on journeys made that month on local trains and buses. Our Secretary analysed the replies and produced and distributed a report at the end of January, showing a very useful snapshot of good and bad points.

85% of trains arrived on time or within 5 minutes, only one train was cancelled and two were severely delayed, while such disruption as did occur was well handled.

However, on one in eight journeys fares were not collected or tickets checked on the train, usually as the conductor was not able to deal with all passengers. Further reports which we have since had from members indicate that this is an ongoing problem.

There was also criticism of the facilities at Lowestoft and Saxmundham stations, with calls for the shop to be reopened, clock repaired and bus real-time information to be installed at the former, and the waiting room and toilet to be reopened at the latter.

One interesting aspect of this survey was that the numbers of passengers arriving at a station by bus doubled to 20% in comparison to our previous survey in August 2015, while 19% came by car and 45% on foot.

Passengers were generally satisfied with the state of the trains, but one in four criticised the toilets, which were sometimes out of order.

Members travelled on buses of seven different operators and reported 80% of these on time or within five minutes, the most significant lateness being 15 minutes. Almost everyone found the drivers helpful and courteous.

Bus stops attracted the most criticism, however, with nearly a quarter of respondents reporting no seat or shelter, 9% no timetable and 12% no bus stop sign. Additional shelters were reported to be needed at Saxmundham Church Street, Ipswich Hospital and Woodbridge Turban Centre.

In our survey, only 18% of bus passengers used the internet to find out times, showing that there is still an important role for printed timetables, leaflets and posters. We are, however, pleased that real-time information screens are now again functioning at Lowestoft bus station.

Some of the rail issues were discussed in more detail when Trevor Garrod and Peter Cogar had a private meeting with James Steward on March 7th.

LIBRARIES MYSTERY SHOPPER

Given the findings of our survey, especially concerning buses, it is important that paper information is still available at public places such as libraries, tourist information offices and other public places.

ESTA committee members therefore undertook a small mystery shopper exercise in January, visiting 14 libraries in our area.

We found that Beccles Library had an excellent selection of all relevant bus and train timetables; but at most other libraries there was something missing. Library staff were very willing to print bus or train timetables for customers from the internet, but usually at a charge, bearing in mind their current targets to maximise revenue.

Some library staff were not aware that bus operators still produced timetables - and very attractive and useful ones in many cases. They knew, of course, that Suffolk County Council stopped producing timetable booklets last year. All that the County Council prints now is a leaflet "Suffolk County Council on line" showing readers how to download timetables and other information.

We know that our visits to libraries have led to some improvements.

FOR YOUR DIARY

The coming months will be full of events for ESTA members and other pro-public transport campaigners. Here is a summary. A booking form for the visits to Wroxham and Bressingham is also enclosed.

SATURDAY APRIL 15th

ALDE VALLEY AND SNAPE MALTINGS WALK organised by Roger Wolfe (rdandaswolfe.2@btinternet.com) from Saxmundham station to Wickham Market station. Free. No need to book.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 19TH:

PUBLIC TRANSPORT FORUM AT GORLESTON LIBRARY. This event has been organised by our sister organisation, the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association and starts at 14.00. It will be of interest to many ESTA members, especially in view of our common interest in the bus services along the coast as well as the Wherry Line trains. Services 99, X1 and 61 all link Lowestoft and Yarmouth (with 61 also calling at Lowestoft rail station) and the buses stop just 50 metres from the library, in the centre of Gorleston. There are several refreshment outlets nearby. The forum will take place in the upstairs lecture theatre.

SATURDAY MAY 20TH

GARDEN OF SUFFOLK WALK from Saxmundham to Darsham. Free, but booking essential via the Suffolk Walking Festival.

SUNDAY JUNE 18TH

ESTA OUTING TO WROXHAM by HACT bus from Halesworth station, leaving at 11:00. Wroxham is a popular centre in the Norfolk Broads, whose attractions also include Miniature Worlds, the Barton House Railway and the Bure Valley Railway. The cost will be £9 per person and a booking form is enclosed with this copy of ESTA NEWS. Please book with our Secretary.

SATURDAY JUNE 24th -

SUMMER MEETING OF THE EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH OF RAILFUTURE (one of the national bodies to which ESTA is affiliated) to be held in St Mary's Stoke Church Hall, Ipswich. For full details, log on to www.railfuture.org.uk

SUNDAY JULY 16TH

WOODBIDGE REGATTA ESTA will hold a stall at this event, which normally attracts large crowds. If you can help, even if only for a couple of hours, please contact our Chairman.

SUNDAY AUGUST 13TH

ESTA OUTING TO BRESSINGHAM. As well as the usual attractions of this steam and garden centre, there will also be a Steam in Miniature special event. The cost will be £8 plus entry fee. We are hoping to negotiate a group reduction. Again, we shall leave Halesworth station in the HACT bus at 11.00. Please book with our Secretary.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 16TH:

We plan to have a boat trip with Waveney River Cruises on Oulton Broad. Full details in next ESTA NEWS.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 23rd/24th

ESTA stall at the East Anglian Transport Museum Trolleybus Event. Offers of help to our Chairman, please.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 14TH

ESTA AUTUMN MEETING in the Gannon Rooms, Saxmundham, at 14:00. We hope to have as speakers a councillor and a bus operator.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 19th

IPSWICH TRANSPORT MUSEUM We hope to have an indoor stand at the Classic Bus and Coach Event.

SATURDAY DECEMBER 16TH

ESTA Christmas Lunch at the Angel Hotel, Halesworth.

AROUND THE BUS STOPS

SNAPE MALTINGS: Two members recently used the bus stop and commented on the fact that the sign for northbound buses was obscured by foliage while there was no sign at all for southbound buses.

ESTA contacted Suffolk County Council's Passenger Transport Department, who arranged for the vegetation to be cut back. The situation on the other side of the road is trickier, we are told, as there is nowhere on Highways land to put up a pole. There is, however, a bus timetable attached to the river bridge. We have therefore suggested another alternative - painting the word "BUS" on the road surface.

CARLTON CROWN (A146) Waveney MP Peter Aldous has agreed to contact Suffolk County Council on ESTA's behalf to see if the very basic facilities at this bus stop can be improved.

DENMARK ROAD LOWESTOFT - It is now 2 years since we were told that agreement had been reached with the landowner for a shelter to be erected. Our Secretary was informed in February by a County Council officer that the landowner had still not signed the agreement but that they were discussing the matter with the local Chamber of Commerce who had "offered to help." We await an update.

AROUND THE STATIONS

HALESWORTH - Network Rail has now erected a gate at each end of the foot crossing as an additional safety measure.

BRAMPTON - Local residents have complained that the new lights are left switched on all night. We have ascertained that they have to be on until 00.15 (to allow for possible late running of the last train) and from 05.30 (for passengers arriving to catch the first train of the morning.) We are considering possible options to address the matter.

BECCLES - We have been assured that money is still earmarked for a new shelter on the down platform (for Lowestoft-bound trains) but drainage problems have to be addressed first, as this part of the platform is currently prone to flooding.

OULTON BROAD NORTH - In the last ESTA News we asked whether any members had experienced undue delay to a train following the repositioning of the signal on the Norwich-bound platform. One member has replied saying that his train was held at the distant signal near Leathes Ham for several minutes until the way was clear to proceed, and the need to wait for the signal was given as the reason for the delay.

LOWESTOFT - In ESTA News 138 we asked any members interested in helping in the Visitor Information Point at Lowestoft station to contact Martin Halliday. In the forthcoming holiday season, it is hoped to open the centre more days a week. If you can help, on a voluntary basis, please contact martin@eastsoffolklne.co.uk or write to him c/o Lowestoft Station, Denmark Road, Lowestoft NR32.

REEDHAM STATION HERITAGE CENTRE - just outside our area, Reedham is served by most Lowestoft - Norwich trains. Mike Warner, one of the station adopters, writes, "Our Heritage Centre comprises two rooms on platform 2 which have been refurbished from a semi-derelict condition and includes toilets. There is a pictorial history of the first Norfolk railway and we have a small collection of railway memorabilia. Visitors are made welcome with a cup of tea or coffee. At present we are open every Tuesday from 10.00 till 15.00 but during the summer months we hope to open on Saturday and Sunday 13.00 - 16.00 in addition to Tuesdays. The summer schedule will be confirmed at a later date.

EAST ANGLIA TRANSPORT MUSEUM: It is many years since you could ride on a tram in Lowestoft, Yarmouth or Norwich, or a trolleybus in Ipswich. However, you can still sample quiet electric trams and trolleybuses, plus a 2-foot gauge railway, at the East Anglia Transport Museum in Carlton Colville, which opens for its 2017 season on April 2nd. Bus services X22 from Lowestoft and 146 from Southwold to Beccles and Norwich call at the museum, while service X2 stops a short walk away at Carlton Crown.

Full details: www.eatransportmuseum.co.uk

BUS SERVICES 63/64/65 DUE TO CHANGE JULY 2ND.

In the last ESTA NEWS we reported that First Bus had reached a partnership agreement with Suffolk County Council (not a "contract") to operate the Ipswich Park & Ride service to and from Martlesham Heath. This will have some impact on the buses from Ipswich to Woodbridge, Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh. ESTA set up a working group of Peter Cogar, Peter Cannon and Geoffrey Lilley to look at possible options and as a result comments have been sent to the bus company. These services are commercial, not sponsored. Our comments have included the need for buses to connect more conveniently with trains at Saxmundham and the case for some re-routing.

NATIONAL LOTTERY FUNDING FOR RURAL BUS SERVICES?

One of our members has suggested this source as a possible method of funding services for which there is no other way. As a result, our Secretary wrote to Bus Users UK (one of the two national bodies to which ESTA is affiliated.) Their advice is that "the onerous application process, coupled with a low success rate, does not make this a worthwhile option in many cases."

ESTA COMMENTS ON TRANSPORT IMPLICATIONS OF SIZEWELL C

On January 24th, our Secretary sent comments as part of the public consultation. We make the point that, if the power station proposal goes ahead, more rail capacity is needed south of Saxmundham. Our preferred option is to double the Woodbridge - Saxmundham section throughout its length. Passenger numbers of the East Suffolk Line are increasing annually such that it is forecast that eventually two trains per hour and increased line capacity will be required anyway

The junction north of Saxmundham should be remodelled for operational flexibility, and the option of a restored passenger service to Leiston in due course must be kept in mind.

It is also proposed to have a park and ride site at Darsham, and this must also be retained, at least in part, for station users after the construction period.

ESTA's Chairman was also interviewed on BBC Look East , which also showed where the double track becomes single, south of Saxmundham station; and he also put ESTA's views on the transport aspects of the scheme at a meeting of Waveney Trades Union Council.

MEANWHILE AT WESTMINSTER...

Mr Peter Aldous MP (Waveney) obtained a 30-minute Parliamentary debate on the need for further investment in the East Suffolk Line, calling for a business plan. ESTA 's Chairman helped Mr Aldous with information in preparation for the debate. Mr Paul Maynard MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Transport, responded by "congratulating the East Suffolk Travellers' Association and the local community rail partnership on all the work they do to sustain this important line" adding that "opportunities may also arise for new passenger services" on the Leiston line.

TRAVELLING ABROAD BY TRAIN? If you make a journey, say, by Eurostar from London to Paris, or by high-speed train from Amsterdam to Cologne, log on to www.epf.eu and answer a short questionnaire on your experiences. This will help the European Passengers' Federation in its work.

ESTA 100 CLUB DRAW

Winners of our last draw of 2016, drawn at the Christmas Lunch in Melton, were: 47 Mrs B M Cannell; 74 Marion Clarke; 3 Ronald Paul; 2 Rod Lock; 45 Robin Price.

The first draw for 2017 will take place at our Annual General Meeting.

Our Treasurer will be pleased to enter you for the draw (made 4 times a year) for 2017 on receipt of a £12 cheque, payable to ESTA.

NEXT ESTA NEWS is due to appear in early July. Please send material to Trevor Garrod at the email address chairman@eastsoffolktravel.org.uk by June 10th.

EAST SUFFOLK TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

BOOKING FORM

To Mr R C H Lock, The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, NR32 3AW

For visit by bus from Halesworth to Wroxham Sunday June 18th 2017 dep 11:00 Cost £9

For visit by bus from Halesworth to Bressingham Sunday August 13th 2017 dep 11:00 Cost £8

NB: These costs do not include entrance to Miniature Worlds, Barton House Railway or Bure Valley Railway at Wroxham; and do not include entrance to Bressingham. We shall try to negotiate a group reduction for the event at Bressingham.

You can also use this form to express your interest in the Oulton Broad boat trip on September 16th. We shall not take any money for that trip at this stage.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

E-MAIL (IF ANY)

I/we wish to book for persons for the ESTA trip to Wroxham on June 18th.

I/we wish to book for persons for the ESTA trip to Bressingham on August 13th

I am interested in the Oulton Broad boat trip on September 16th. Please send me details in due course.

Please complete or delete as appropriate.

Please make cheque payable to ESTA.

Further details of the trips will be sent to you nearer the date.

Thank you for your support.