



NEWS

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TRAINS AND BUSES ON OUR AGENDA AT ST MARKS

On Saturday February 17th ESTA holds its spring meeting at St Marks Church Centre, next to Oulton Broad South station, commencing at 14.00.

The venue is part of St Marks Church, in Bridge Road. The easiest way from the station is to use the approach road, cross Beccles Road at the traffic lights and turn left along the path, then over the combined pedestrian and cycle bridge. The church is then on your right.

Trains from Ipswich reach Oulton Broad South at 35 minutes past the hour and from Lowestoft at 13 minutes past. If you arrive at, say, 12.35 you may like to continue a few minutes along Bridge Road, where you can find a choice of places to have lunch.

The meeting will feature reports and discussion on all the bus and train issues concerning our association, and we also want to learn more about the public transport plans of Suffolk County Council.

We invited Councillor James Finch, the Transport Portfolio-holder, who has unfortunately become unwell. If he is not fully recovered by February 17th, the talk will be given instead by Councillor Jane Storey, who has been holding the fort in the meantime. Teas and coffees will be available as will transport literature.

After this, our next big meeting will be the AGM on Saturday May 12th in Quay Street Church, Woodbridge.

ESTA MEMBERS REPORT THEIR TRAIN AND BUS JOURNEYS

Thank you to all those members who reported on their local journeys during October. Our Secretary received 120 replies and is working through these. We shall issue a report in the New Year. This will be sent to train and bus operators, local authorities and politicians, and a summary released to the news media. It will also help us with our campaigning during 2018.

ESTA'S PRESS OFFICER For the first time in several years, ESTA now has a Press Officer. He is Peter Pennington from Woodbridge and was appointed at our October 14th meeting. He can be contacted on peter.pennington1@btinternet.com

REPORT OF ESTA'S AUTUMN MEETING

The large Gannon Room was well filled for our meeting in Saxmundham on October 14th. The main focus was on buses, and we were very pleased to welcome Mr David Jordan, Marketing Manager of First Eastern Counties and his Commercial Manager colleague Mr Paul Martin. Our guests gave us an update on the company's services in different parts of ESTA's area and the challenges and opportunities they faced. Mr Jordan made the general point that, in the past, services had often changed, and if timetables changed too frequently, some people stopped using them because they did not trust the information. At the present time, he said, apart from some minor timetable changes, "Everything we've done has been about developing services and getting more passengers."

In December 2015, for example, they had recast the Lowestoft - Beccles - Norwich bus service, partly in response to pressure from Beccles people, giving 4 buses an hour for most of the day, and this had been very successful. "We can't compete with the train for journey time from the centre of Lowestoft to the centre of Norwich," he said, "but if you live in a growing area like Carlton Colville, for example, the bus to Beccles or Norwich is more convenient."

In May 2015 First Eastern Counties had reintroduced service 99 between Lowestoft, Kessingland and Southwold, originally aimed at holidaymakers, but now ran it all year. To get the best utilisation out of their vehicles, they ran some through Wangford and some via the more direct route via South Cove.

In Norwich they had colour-coded the services and anyone typing in "red bus in Norwich" would be directed to the relevant timetable.

Their operation in Ipswich was rather different, however, as their services tended to go "around rather than in" the urban area. They had also established a formula that enabled them to operate the Park & Ride commercially (whereas it had previously required a Suffolk County Council subsidy). Their marketing was based on the message, "If you don't have to drive into Ipswich, use Park & Ride". They also had to acknowledge that Park & Ride customers were not usually bus users, and they expected a direct service into the town centre, without diversions to serve housing estates. The Park & Ride had shown a 25% increase in usage since First Eastern Counties started to operate it in early July.

On the other hand, service 65, from Ipswich to Aldeburgh via Snape, had not been covering its costs - indeed, a bus service that only ran every two hours was not usually viable. This was a major factor in recasting the service in the summer of 2017, providing instead an hourly service from Ipswich via the A12 to Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh.

Mr Jordan and Mr Martin also answered a range of questions, including ticketing and punctuality. They explained how bus operators were compensated for carrying concessionary pass holders. They also stated that services would need to be diverted or amended during the forthcoming roadworks at Woods Lane, Melton. ESTA subsequently issued a press release on this topic.

ESTA committee member Peter Cogar reported on his discussions with Suffolk County Council officers about how PF Travel's service 62 (sponsored by the County Council) might be enhanced. It currently provides a very basic Monday - Friday service between Snape, Framlingham and Woodbridge with some buses passing Wickham Market station. When it started there was not even a bus timetable at the bus stop outside the station. We are pleased to report that there is one now.

Peter Cogar has also produced some very informative timetable posters giving train and bus connections at Saxmundham for Leiston and Aldeburgh and at Halesworth for Southwold. These are being displayed on our station boards, together with Peter's notices about changes to train timetables because of public holidays or engineering work.

WHILE ON THE SUBJECT OF WICKHAM MARKET... If you are waiting at the station, having parked there or come by PF bus for example, you can refresh yourself in the station house cafe. Bob and Rosamund are open every day: from 06.00 to 18.00 Monday - Friday; 06.30 to 18.00 on Saturday and 08.30 to 18.00 Sunday. Their cheese scones with onion chutney are also to be recommended!

MEANWHILE AT BECCLES STATION CAFE you can also enjoy hot and cold drinks, tasty sandwiches, cakes, bananas and other snacks from 07.30 Monday - Friday, 09.00 Saturday and 10.00 Sunday. They close at 14.30 each day. They are also a Visitor Information Point.

ESTA ACTION

1. HALESWORTH STATION FOOT CROSSING

A local press report in the early autumn stated that Network Rail had carried out a census on Halesworth station for 9 days in June and found that 278 people "misused" the crossing. This usually meant walking behind or in front of a stationary train, but also included cycling over the crossing and trespassing on the track. The option to close the crossing completely remained a possibility if the situation did not improve.

ESTA therefore conducted its own survey for a week from October 30th, during which time 13 of our members took it in turn to observe the crossing and note numbers of people using it. A sincere thank you to everyone who took part.

During a total of 60 hours we observed 730 people using the crossing, of which 397 were rail passengers. 136 walked in front of Ipswich-bound trains and 9 walked over the crossing to the rear of a Lowestoft-bound train. 6 cyclists did not dismount. No one was seen walking on the track. Many people looked to see if the line was clear before walking across, while the great majority waited for the train to leave before they used the crossing.

In a report sent to Network Rail, Greater Anglia, Halesworth Town Council and Dr Therese Coffey MP, we suggested that there was a reduction in the numbers "misusing" the crossing compared to the time of Network Rail's camera survey in June. Our observers also judged that only three passengers were conceivably putting themselves in danger, and one of those did so by cycling along the platform before storing his machine.

We suggested that all train drivers could sound their horn before proceeding and that a cautionary reminder should be made on the train's public address system prior to arrival in Halesworth station.

On November 27th ESTA's Chairman joined two Halesworth Town Councillors and two Network Rail officials for a site meeting, partly to discuss our report and also to consider how the small minority of people not obeying the signs at the crossing could be encouraged to do so.

Network Rail themselves are planning to do another survey at Halesworth in the near future.

2. STATION AUDIT

A team of ESTA committee members has started a station audit, considering all aspects of each East Suffolk Line station - such as the signage, shelters and seating, car, cycle and motorcycle parking, information and bus interchange facilities. The team is led by Peter Pennington and will also consider what progress has been made since our last such audit in the spring of 2013.

3. THE SIZEWELL TRAIN THAT RARELY RUNS

One reason why we do not have an exact even interval service from Ipswich in the afternoon is that a slot is reserved for a freight train that may be run to Sizewell siding. Our committee member Peter Cogar has been investigating why this is, and been involved in correspondence with Network Rail. Apparently, in order to keep the option of a regular freight service open, a train must occasionally be run in that slot.

However, we have now written to Greater Anglia stating that surely "the time has come for that train path to be removed", so that an even interval passenger service can run throughout the afternoon. We would support the running of a replacement bus service on the very rare occasions when such a train path is needed.

4. DISAPPEARING 61 BUS

On November 13th Anglian Bus cut back this service so that it only runs between Kessingland and the James Paget Hospital and is less frequent; but it still provides a cross-town north/south service in Lowestoft and passes East Coast College. We expressed regret to the bus operator but suggested the through service to Yarmouth should be reinstated in the holiday season when it is very useful for our summer visitors. Our colleagues in the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association also protested to the company.

Service 61 is a purely commercial operation, not sponsored by either County Council. At the end of November we then learned that the service is to be withdrawn completely in January.

First Eastern Counties (who run four buses an hour between Lowestoft and Yarmouth) have introduced an extra early morning service from Lowestoft to Kessingland and back. We have written to ask them if they will enhance their own services 99, 1 and 1A to fill the gap left when the service 61 is completely withdrawn.

ESTA IN CONSULTATIONS

1. IPSWICH LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

ESTA submitted comments in response to transport-related questions in October. We supported the Medium Growth Forecast as the town is ideally placed to attract jobs and housing demand. We stated, "Communities are more likely to accept significant new growth if it means significant new infrastructure will be provided". As the consultative document accepts that capacity on local rail lines is already a problem, we press for additional platform capacity at Ipswich and more doubling of single tracks. In particular, we state "Ideally the whole section from Woodbridge to Saxmundham should be doubled".

In our view, growth should be focussed on towns with good (or potential) access to the rail network and from which a half-hourly service into Ipswich should be the aspiration.

We also remind the planners of the need for an enhanced service to Westerfield to be part of the package when Ipswich Garden Village is built.

Our response also points out that a recent study of estate agents' websites revealed that "distance to the nearest rail station" has overtaken "school catchment" as being the most important consideration for families deciding where to live.

The consultation also refers to electric cars, and our response makes the point that these have a role to play for all or part of a journey but must not be seen as a panacea to all problems because they still cause congestion.

2. EAST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE

This may not seem very relevant to our area, but it is for cross-country journeys from Ipswich and Lowestoft via Norwich and Peterborough. We therefore responded, as did our sister organisation the East Norfolk Transport Users' Association. ESTA urged that the existing Norwich - Liverpool service via Peterborough, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester be retained in its entirety. It links our area with a series of important cities and is important for business travellers, students, families and tourists. Having to change en route would be a disincentive. One change (at Norwich or, for Ipswich passengers, at Ely) is enough.

3. LOWESTOFT THIRD CROSSING

It is promised that Lowestoft will have a high level bridge across Lake Lothing, to supplement the existing bridges at the harbour and in Oulton Broad, by 2022.

ESTA responded to a consultation by welcoming the fact that the proposed new bridge will cross the railway on a viaduct and so should not affect present and future train services.

Assuming that Station Square is then remodelled, we urge that bus priority measures be introduced - and, of course, we are still waiting for the promised bus shelter in Denmark Road for southbound buses.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG ON THE MAIN LINE

Following our member Simon Barrow's article in the last ESTA NEWS, our Chairman has written to Network Rail and Greater Anglia posing 6 questions. Detailed replies have been received. The key points in these are:

1. Feedback is encouraged from front-line staff and in Network Rail's case a daily local conference is held, feeding up to a national conference to share learning from major incidents. Greater Anglia also conducts a post-incident review whenever there is a major problem.

2. Network Rail reimburses the Train Operating Companies when there are signalling failures. Greater Anglia also have to pay Network Rail if the problems are the operator's fault. Compensation received from Network Rail can be passed on by Greater Anglia to the customers under the delay repay scheme.

3. The main reasons for signal breakdowns tend to be related to the age and condition of the equipment. Network Rail also have a "delays explained" section on their website.

4. Greater Anglia's trains experience a "technical incident" around once in 25,000 miles, which is a great improvement on the situation when they started in 2012 and compares favourably with the current industry-wide figure of an incident every 15,000 miles.

5. Punctuality on Greater Anglia is slightly better than the national average. Network Rail's record on overall performance and especially safety compares well with that of other systems across Europe.

6. Greater Anglia and Network Rail work closely with each other and with the Samaritans to try to reduce fatalities caused by a person being struck by a train. There were ten separate instances of this on the London - Norwich main line during the past twelve months.

Simon Barrow is continuing to keep a log of his journeys to and from London and plans to write another article for the next ESTA NEWS.

ESTA AT IPSWICH TRANSPORT MUSEUM

For the first time in seven years, ESTA held a stall at the bus and coach event at the Ipswich Transport Museum on November 19th. This attracted visitors from across the region and there was steady interest in the literature on our table and the ESTA display boards which we erected alongside. The five hours passed remarkably quickly!

Thank you to Trevor Garrod, Geoffrey Lilley, Peter Cogar, Maureen Bayes and David Colledge for their help on the day.

ESTA 100 CLUB

You can join this club if you are a paid-up member of ESTA. Just send a cheque for £12 for one year to our Treasurer.

Winners are drawn four times a year. In the draw on November 29th the following members were winners:

22	P J Amos	Halstead	£30
13	R Price	London	£25
36	M Wilson	Slough	£25
81	D Adams	Saxmundham	£20
43	Mrs E Flint	Hacheston	£15

NON-COLLECTION OF TRAIN FARES

Two ESTA committee members report journeys they made in late November when the conductor-guard did not collect their fares.

This is the sort of thing we need to know, as we can then feed the information to railway management. You can use the ESTA Feedback facility on our website to report it. We shall not divulge your name to anyone.

During the RMT strike days this autumn, the managers and office staff who performed the guards' duties of opening and closing doors did not collect fares either.

ON THE SUBJECT OF TRAIN FARES...

An increase is due at the beginning of January. We can expect some of the news media and politicians to make loud protests and, of course, no one likes having to pay more for anything. On the other hand, not all fares go up by the same amount, and advance purchase tickets - where these are available - can still give good value for money. An ESTA member found this when (with a Railcard) he only had to pay £19.90 for a return journey from Lowestoft to London at the end of November. He could only use it on particular trains, but he knew several days in advance when he had to be in London and when his meeting there was to finish. On this occasion, being restricted to particular trains was not therefore a problem.

Will the under-publicised Anglia Plus tickets also cost more in January? For many journeys in our region they also give flexibility and good value for money. We shall again endeavour to publicise them, such as on our station boards.

CALLING MEMBERS WITH ARTISTIC OR PHOTOGRAPHIC SKILLS

We need one or more pictures that can be used on an ESTA recruitment poster. They should show people as well as trains or buses. If you are able to help, or know someone who can, please contact Trevor Garrod.

EXCURSIONS IN 2018: Our committee has had preliminary discussion and proposes to offer at least two visits next year: one to Sheringham (for North Norfolk Railway and all the other attractions) by scheduled train using an Anglia Plus ticket; and one by boat down the Orwell from Ipswich (repeating two very popular trips we made in 2014). We welcome other suggestions from members, and hope to have full details in our Spring issue - and, of course, on our website.

DOUGLAS BEGBIE

Mr Begbie passed away at the end of September and ESTA's Chairman attended his funeral service on October 11th in Pakefield Church. Members observed a minute's silence at the ESTA public meeting three days later.

Doug Begbie was an active member of our association for many years when he lived in Halesworth, and later in Pakefield, and for several years served on our committee. Our condolences have been sent to his family.

OUR NEIGHBOURING ASSOCIATIONS

FELIXSTOWE TRAVELWATCH will hold their next public meeting on Tuesday February 6th in the Salvation Army Hall, starting at 14.30. For details, log on to : ftw.onesuffolk.net

THE EAST NORFOLK TRANSPORT USERS' ASSOCIATION has protested against proposed bus cuts in Norfolk - some of which may affect services that cross the border into Suffolk. ESTA maintains close liaison with ENTUA which, like us, publishes a regular bulletin and whose activities are featured on its website www.entua.org.uk

RAILFUTURE'S EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH will hold its AGM in the Friends Meeting House, St John's Street, Bury St Edmunds on Saturday February 24th. ESTA is affiliated to Railfuture, the national voluntary body for rail users, and our members are welcome at its branch meeting. www.railfuture.org.uk

Thank you to Gryff Consulting of Saxmundham for production and electronic distribution of ESTA NEWS and maintenance of our website.

We wish all members a peaceful and restful Christmas and a happy New Year.

Deadline for next issue: March 1st. Please send material to: editor@eastsoffolktravel.org.uk



As winter tightens its grip, just a reminder of how wonderful the Suffolk Coast, as here in Southwold, can be – all reached simply by public transport. Can you spot the seagull? Only one I hear you ask?