

## EAST SUFFOLK TRAVEL ASSOCIATION 2022 AGM

### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Although COVID-19 lingered on for two years, ESTA maintained regular contacts with rail and bus companies to continue and improve their services during this period.

Both industries received considerable Government financial support. In the case of the rail industry this also involved a significant change in management structure: franchising was replaced by tight, some say tighter, government control, with Train Operating Companies (TOCs) for example Greater Anglia, becoming mere providers (contractors) of services, but with an incentive to increase revenue and reduce costs, for which they would be financially rewarded, in addition to a contractual fee.

For example, a matter which ESTA was pressing for, an extension of some East Suffolk Line services to Liverpool Street, a decision which no longer rests with Greater Anglia, although they may have a view. It has been reported that even minor decisions are taken by the Department for Transport and in some cases by the Minister him- or herself.

Significant financial decisions, as ever, involve the Treasury. Hence it is unlikely we will get through trains in the short term. At the same time, operationally there is only a two-track railway, with a few passenger loops, throughout, plus two tracks onwards from Shenfield – the Elizabeth Line - useless even for diversions.

However, in East Anglia we now have a modern fleet of rolling stock. The class 755s, in use on the East Suffolk and other rural routes, result in high praise from users and transport commentators.

The cost structures of rail and bus are very different, with the former having a high fixed costs infrastructure, so financial support has been high and, of course, ongoing, causing the Treasury concern. Nevertheless the industry has also received financial support

I live on one of First's (Lowestoft) bus routes, with a bus stop directly opposite my house. By the time the buses reach me en route to Lowestoft, they have passed through substantial housing and yet buses are either empty or have just one or two passengers on board. Possibly the reduced attraction of Lowestoft as a shopping centre has a bearing. A census of arrivals at the bus station would help.

Whilst the subject of Sizewell C divides opinion, it is possible that objectors do not ask themselves "Do I want my house lit and heated?" I once lived in the shadow of Stansted Airport, both before and after expansion, a comparable situation. The development produced quite a few millionaires, not self-made and not me. My local village football team lost its ground and was unable to find a replacement.

The East Suffolk Line is affected. We have said that construction materials must be received by rail, requiring additional infrastructure, which will also enable passenger services to be increased, when it is no longer required for Sizewell C.

Finally, my grateful thanks, as ever deserved, for the hard working ESTA committee, for their work and endeavour during the past year.

Roderick Lock

21<sup>st</sup> May 2022