THE TRAVELLER

NEWSLETTER OF FELIXSTOWE TRAVEL WATCH

FELIXSTOWE TRAVEL WATCH

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Felixstowe Travel Watch's Annual General Meeting is on

Tuesday 9th May 2017

at the Salvation Army Church, Cobbold Road - at 7.30pm

Chairman's Editorial

***Graham Newman** writes...*

Welcome to this 128th edition of *The Traveller* - with its usual mix of news and views on the Public Transport scene, together with updates on our 2017 Tours programme and our Annual Report. A glance through the accompanying AGM papers shows you the high level of activity maintained by TravelWatch throughout 2016. But the need for our constant vigilence, and keeping up the pressure for improvements never seems to diminish - not least with this past month's development in the matter of National Express coach route 481. In addition, our Tours programme continues to offer our members interesting and socially beneficial days out.

As Bryan Frost has recently pointed out, we probably enjoy one of the best levels of bus service Felixstowe has ever experienced, and certainly "above our weight" in terms of other Suffolk market towns of comparable size. The promise of new trains on our line, and other franchise commitments made by Greater Anglia, probably gives us a best ever chance to get the improvements we need along the line - better journey times, reliability, signage, shelterage and ticket vending facilities (particularly at Derby Road, but also at Trimley)... but perhaps most of important of all, to improve the reputation and acceptance of public transport in the eyes of the general public.

Hands up all those who are supporting the Ipswich Star's *Ditch The Car* campaign? Those of us lucky enough to live in Felixstowe really don't have an excuse not to!

E-mail Graham on graham.newman.FLX@gmail.com

Secretary's Notes

***Margaret Morris,** our Hon Secretary on our forthcoming meeting programme.*

Our headline activity this edition is our forthcoming **Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 9th May,** which will be held in the Salvation Army Church as usual, but **starting at 7.30pm.** In accordance with FTW's constitution, please take this as your formal 14-day notification of the meeting,

With the loss of one of our stalwart Executive Committee members - Philip Jordan - earlier this year, we are looking for new nominations both to fill this vacancy, and to help to share the load of the various activities FTW supports throughout the year.

Before we have refreshments and attend to the business of the AGM, we will welcome Cllr Phil Smart as our main speaker. Phil is an Ipswich Borough Councillor, and knowledgeable commentator on the public transport scene both locally and nationally.

Our next public transport stall in the arcade entrance of Hamilton Road's East of England Co-op on **Saturday 10th June** between 9.30am & 12noon**.** This will be a chance to pick up all the new publicity we have, including the summer train timetables, so please drop by.

Our next major initiative will take place on **Wednesdays July 26th & 2nd August,** when in conjunction with Greater Anglia, we will run the *Seaside Special* - the 10.58 departure from Ipswich (11.09 ex-Derby Road). The train will be met by the Mayor of Felixstowe and there will be free gifts for the participants!

E-mail Margaret on margaretamorris@hotmail.com

FELIXSTOWE TRAVEL WATCH OFFICERS

Life Presidents	Ken Tricker & John Woollan	01394 278770 /210271
Chairman & Editor 'The Traveller'	Graham Newman, 1 Mellis Court, Felixstowe IP11 2YQ	01394 286937
Vice Chairman	Richard Holland, 14 Princes Gardens, Felixstowe IP11 7RH	01394 278061
Hon Secretary	Margaret Morris, 79 Ranelagh Road, Felixstowe IP11 7HY	01394 274345
Hon Treasurer	Peter Leitch, 104 St Andrews Road, Felixstowe IP11 7ED	01394 285320

Public Transport Notes

Bryan Frost
(E-mail: bmwfrost@btopenworld.com)
Chair of FTW's Public Transport Committee, updates you on latest developments

NATIONAL EXPRESS COACHES

It is very rare for these notes to give 'top billing' to the National Express coach service 481, which operates from Felixstowe to London's Victoria Coach Station, but the recent unwelcome developments in this service deserve some prominence. With effect from 13 March, although the sole daily journey on this route has been maintained, the amended timings do nothing to encourage people to choose the coach for a day trip to the capital.

The coach now departs Great Eastern Square at 8.35am. (8.55 at weekends), and does not reach Victoria until 12.20pm – almost lunchtime! In the return direction, departure from Victoria is as early as 4.30pm, (instead of the previous 6pm.) giving an arrival in Felixstowe shortly after 8.30pm.

Furthermore, the route within central London has been changed, so that the former stopping point at the Embankment has been discontinued in favour of a diversion to Waterloo – a decision which appears to be inexplicable, especially as Waterloo, situated on the south bank of the Thames, is further away from Central London and the West End. The roads on the final stretch from Waterloo to journey's end at Victoria are notoriously congested, which will make a punctual arrival a very challenging prospect.

National Express justifies these changes partly on the basis that travellers with ongoing connections at Victoria will have less time to wait there, as it appears that a significant number start their journeys from the capital at around 2pm and that coaches from other parts of the country tend to arrive in larger numbers during the early afternoon, so that the 4.30 departure will be more convenient for transferring passengers than a mid-evening timing. To which one is inclined to say, Hmm... What is clear is that instead of having nearly seven hours in the capital, the day excursionist will now have barely four – a most unattractive and inconvenient prospect which must surely result in a loss of patronage. No doubt the reader can begin to deduce where this may be leading...

National Express also asserts that these changes are necessary on economic grounds, as they have had to review the financial aspects of their operations extremely closely, which no doubt explains why they have been introduced at very short notice, and judging by the scrappy piece of paper which was offered to me (in a local information centre) as a timetable after they came in to effect, with minimal concessions to publicity.

The few 'positives' stemming from this situation are that a through coach from Felixstowe has been retained (at least for now), and that for the real diehards, there is a later departure from Victoria at 8pm, which arrives in Ipswich's Cardinal Park at 10.50, giving in theory a connection into the last bus (on weekdays) from the Old Cattle Market at 11.15 – best of luck with that one!

Of course, the irony is that in our last Newsletter (127) I advocated the use of coach 481 as one means of avoiding the dreaded train-bus-tube combination when travelling to and from London at weekends, whilst the current railway engineering blockades are in operation. At the time of writing, these are set to continue until early May, with the exception of 22nd and 23rd April, when there will be no trains between Ipswich and Norwich instead! This peremptory action by National Express has since greatly diminished the attraction of this alternative.

Now for a truly revolutionary thought – with no through rail service for several weekends, why not exploit this gap in the market by operating a regular express coach service from these parts to Central London, or even Stansted Airport, for the duration? Perhaps Abellio could hire the coaches and retain the fares? And shouldn't the cost of such a substitute operation be borne by Network Rail as a necessary cost of constructing Crossrail in any event?

All of this is some way away from the current National Express situation, but wouldn't it have been good for that company to have run a few extra coaches itself – it is after all, a deregulated market. Dream on, I'm afraid.

Incidentally, the recent baffling prohibition imposed on local 481 journeys is due to be lifted shortly, probably on 22nd May. This restriction bore no common sense and whilst it is good to see it being lifted, this short sighted move should never have been introduced in the first place.

Finally, a glance at the National Express website reveals that the operator is still displaying the pre-March 2017 timings for this route! Says it all, really!

RAIL

Transport & Works Act Order published for new works at Trimley The statutory Transport & Works Act Order (TWAO) in connection with this scheme was published on 6 March, and consultation is open until 19th April. The TWAO is required as it is proposed that six level crossings will be closed with a bridge being constructed at Gun Lane.

Considering that the scheme involves the construction of less than a mile of new railway track, the paperwork accompanying the Order is voluminous – in the region of 2,000 pages!

If all goes to plan, work is planned to start at the end of this year, with completion scheduled for mid- 2019.

With funding for additional major rail investment having hit the buffers in recent times, the project is a

significant 'win' and when completed will deliver major benefits for both passenger and freight traffic on the line - let's just hope that the project becomes reality.

Reliability of the branch passenger service improves in 2017...so far The good news story so far this year is the strong improvement in reliability and punctuality of the rail service on the Felixstowe line. With very few exceptions, most trains regularly run to time or within a few minutes of 'right time' and the hourly 'clockface' pattern of passenger and freight paths appears to be working. The benign winter and early spring weather has certainly helped, and it would seem that the closer working between Greater Anglia and Network Rail, envisaged in the new franchise which commenced last October, is paying off.

Long may this continue!

Office development in Princes Street, Ipswich should encourage rail commuting! Travelling from the rail station into the centre of Ipswich nowadays, one cannot help but notice the mushrooming office developments taking shape along Princes Street, which are transforming a rather down at heel area into what should be a smart new commercial quarter once these projects are fully completed and occupied.

It is noticeable when travelling around regional towns and cities at peak hours, that rail commuting has become very popular, and this is true even where there is only an hourly service, due in no small way to the widespread adoption of the modern concept of flexi-time.

There is a challenge here for Greater Anglia, with new trains coming on stream at a time when a number of these developments are likely to come to fruition. A great opportunity arises to exploit the extra capacity and speed which the new trains will offer as 'congestion busters'.

Greater Anglia's Stations Social and Community Development Plan (SSCDP) This rather wordy title describes the latest in a series of initiatives which purport to improve the experience of the passenger at our local stations.

The usual fine platitudes may be found in abundance: 'ensuring that stations are welcoming and accessible', impressive gateways to their local communities', 'looking to consistently (sic) improve station presentation standards' etc.

The consultation period for responses to this document was a mere seven days, prompting cynical thoughts that this was yet another box-ticking exercise.

Nevertheless, with some of our stations being sorely in need of improvement to a greater extent than many on the whole national network (think Derby Road for starters), we could not lose this opportunity to make our voice heard, even within the confines of this unacceptably short timescale.

As the consultation was described as 'initial', no doubt this leaves plenty of opportunities for further consultations, before any much needed urgent investment actually takes place.

We await further developments with bated breath and eager anticipation!

BUSES

Effects of local road works have been largely overcome Although the Ipswich to Felixstowe corridor has been affected by some of the extensive road works which have sprung up hereabouts in recent weeks, it does appear that most delays have been minor in nature, and tribute must be paid to the sterling efforts of the First bus drivers who have, by and large, maintained services to their usual reliable standards. Hopefully most of these works will finish within the coming few weeks, in time for the summer season, which will see the return of...

Felixstowe's Open top bus! The open topper will return this summer with slight variations in its days of operation, brought about by a recent change in legislation which now restricts vehicles of this type (without step free access) to fewer operating days per year. We have agreed with Ipswich Buses that the open topper will operate on each Wednesday during the school holidays (from 26 July to 30 August) and on the four Sundays during August. As the bus also operates tours in Ipswich during this period, it is restricted to just ten operating days in Felixstowe.

We hope to organise the popular seaside special trains on Wednesdays 26 July and 2 August, which will link up with the open top bus – a very welcome attraction last year.

The new bus shelters are here...

Felixstowe Travel Watch has campaigned for a shelter opposite the Half Moon pub in Walton for some time now... and here it is, newly installed during February. A similar shelter has been installed in Gosford Way, opposite Margery Girling House. [Photo: Bryan Frost

Tours News

Please see the supplement for an update on our tours programme for 2017 enclosed with this edition of *The Traveller.*

Details for Tour 7, Probus 2's outing to Southwold on Saturday July 15th, are now confirmed. The show at the Summer Theatre will be *Communicating Doors* by Alan Ayckbourn. The coach leaves Garrison Lane at 10.30am & returns to Felixstowe by 8.30pm, and the inclusve cost is £22. Book with Phil Speirs for Probus 2.

FTW's Tour 8, the Blue Badge Guided Tour of *Essex off the Beaten Track*, will take place on Wednesday 20th September. It takes in Hadleigh Castle, Southend Airport, Battlesbridge Antiques (lunch stop) and Stow Maries Word War 1 airfield (Cream Tea included). The cost is £30, our coach leaves Felixstowe at 8.30am and returns by 6.30pm. Gwynneth is the booking agent.

Our Tour 9 - to the Gilbert & Sullivan opera at the Seckford Theatre, Woodbridge - are confirmed as *Trial by Jury* and *The Sorcerer*. Gwynneth is the booking agent.

Tour No 10 - Probus 2's outing to Bury St Edmunds - takes place on Wednesday October 25th. It leaves Felixstowe at 9.30am, and returns at 5pm, giving at least five hours at the Market Day. Cost is £16 and bookings are with Phil Speirs.

Well, The Thought Was There!

Saturday 4th March - a home match day for Ipswich Town FC, and Greater Anglia obligingly provided the first newly refurbished Class 170 2-coach diesel unit for service on the branch... except one coach was locked out of use due to the failure of a door mechanism!

We are promised that all the existing Class 170 trains will be refurbished before the new Flirt trains are delivered in 2019. They are certainly very smart in the GA white livery, with new carpets and 2-tone grey moquette. *[Photos: GN*

Membership Renewal

Time now to renew your membership for 2017 (or pay for 2016 if it has slipped your memory!) Look out for the Red Spot on your Newsletter envelope label which shows that your membership is now overdue. Jean Leitch, our Membership Secretary, will be at the Annual General Meeting to take your money and issue new membership cards. Alternatively, please send your cheque (payable to *Felixstowe Travel Watch)* enclosing a stamped addressed envelope to **Mrs Jean Leitch, 104 St Andrews Road, Felixstowe IP11 7ED** £3 for individuals or £4 for families (plus an extra £1.50 if you need your Newsletters posted to you or if you live outside our hand delivery area).

Upcoming 'Route Improvement' works

Many members will be aware that improvement works frequently affect weekend train services on the Felixstowe branch, and/or services radiating from Ipswich. According to the Greater Anglia web site, you can expect bus substitution throughout the day on part or all of your journey on the following days:

Felixstowe-Ipswich branch: Sun 4/6

From Ipswich towards London: Sat/Sun/Mon 29/4, 30/4 & 1/5; Suns 21/5 & 28/5; Mon 29/5; Suns 4/6 & 25/6

From Ipswich towards Norwich: Sat/Sun 22-23/4; Sun 4/6, Sun 18/6

From Ipswich towards Cambridge or Peterborough: Sat/Sun 22-23/4; Sun 7/5*; Sun 14/5*; Suns 4/6, 18/6 & 25/6 (* - Peterborough only)

Some early morning and later evening services may be altered in addition to the above, and of course there is always the possibility that further changes can be imposed at short notice. So please check before travelling. See www.greateranglia.co.uk/travel-information/service-alterations

Sunday 4th June seems to be a day when you'd be best avoiding train travel altogether, wherever you want to go!

Autumn Members' Meeting - October 17th

Don't forget to put the date for our Autumn public meeting in your diary - **Tuesday October 17th at 2.30pm,** in the Salvation Army Church,when our main speaker will be Alex Kirk, Network Rail's design manager for the new passing loop at Trimley with its accompanying improvements to level crossings and signalling. *GN*

Typeset & printed by GLN ♦ Tel: 01394 286937 ♦ #1 IP11 2YQ ♦ E-mail: Graham.Newman.FLX@gmail.com