

“ONTRACK”

WALTON ON THE NAZE, FRINTON ON SEA, KIRBY CROSS & THORPE LE SOKEN RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION
(SERVING THE CLACTON & WALTON LINES)

HEADCOUNT OF PASSENGERS AT FRINTON-ON-SEA STATION: 29TH NOVEMBER 2013

1. INTROUCTION

1.1 “ONTRACK” Rail Users Association carried out a headcount of passengers boarding and alighting from all trains calling at Frinton-on-Sea station on **Friday 29th November 2013** including the very first trains and last trains of the day. The results of this headcount are shown in **Appendices 1 & 2**, Appendix 1 is a consolidated summary with the column headed “Friday 29/11/13”, *showing that a total of 345 passengers boarded trains while 355 alighted from trains, giving a total footfall for the day of 700*, plus comparison with some ad hoc counts made by travelling members of the association. **Appendix 2** shows the completed census log tables for the November 29th 2013 and Appendix 3 shows also the results short kerbside exercise conducted at Frinton and Walton Stations at the start of Summer 2013. Appendix 4 shows the Office for Rail Regulation official data. “ONTRACK” RUA thanks all the volunteers from the Association, plus the members of local community stakeholder groups such as the Frinton Residents Association, Frinton & Walton Heritage Trust, Frinton in Bloom and also local Tendring District and Essex County councillors who gave up their time to help run the census on November 29th. .

1.2 Initial analysis suggests that compared with the official Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) data the actual usage, on not necessarily the busiest commuting day of the week that the actual ridership could be up to 24% greater than the daily average of the (ORR) data.

1.3 The reason for undertaking this exercise is to para quote the article in **RAIL Issue 738** is *<that spending of money on improving rail services is tied to current and forecast passenger numbers and revenue, and to the prediction of future increases if that spending is committed. However the passenger numbers published by the Office of Rail Regulation can sometimes be inaccurate, owing to shortcomings in the railway’s data capture rather than those who analyse data.*

Inaccuracies can appear as a result of ticketless travel. and on routes where there are few staffed stations and no automatic barriers... dishonest passengers soon realise this omission>

In addition to this there is the possibility that for season tickets bought through employer’s corporate travel agents, or outside the area, and conductor guards banking receipts at remote base station, that accounting systems may not always accurately point the credits for fares through to the appropriate station/ cost centre.

1.4 The Association has been aware services do not match traffic demands or travel patterns with the village junction station of Thorpe le Soken being one of the busiest interchange stations outside of Norwich Thorpe Station, requiring many passengers to change trains circa 8 miles into their journey or towards the end of it. This has created a lot of passenger dissatisfaction due to the problems created by missed connections arising from late running trains and long waits with often minimal facilities available for the next hourly service.

1.5 Timetable changes over the last 25 years have resulted in the gradual deterioration in the standard of the service to Liverpool Street. This has included the withdrawal of main-line style electric multiple units as well as the gradual increase in journey times

due to the introduction of additional intermediate stops. The latter is most noticeable in the evening peak departures from Liverpool Street where the fastest service in 2014 is slower than the slowest service in 1984.

1.6 This report aims to draw attention to the mismatch between ORR data and actual passenger usage so that better matched train services in terms of frequency, capacity and service pattern can be developed. However, it is anticipated that further sampling may be necessary to improve on the overall statistical efficacy of the results obtained so far to in excess of the 95% Confidence Level.

2. Methodology

2.1 Teams of two census takers attended Frinton station between 5.20 a.m. and 11.50 p.m. covering two to three hour shifts and each counted independently those boarding and alighting trains running in the DOWN direction towards Walton On The Naze and running in the UP direction towards Thorpe Le Soken, Colchester and/ or London, recording onto the log sheets. The consolidated log record is reproduced in Appendix 2. Fresh teams were issued with new log sheets in order to safeguard data. In addition survey forms were handed out to travellers arriving to board services and a separate report will be issued shortly.

2.2 ORR figures were based on those last available and daily averages as calculated were based on the following alternative options on a five day working week excluding weekends, and public holidays b). on a modified 6 day week excluding Sundays and on certain other options assuming a very low ridership on Sunday services

3. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

3.1 As already indicated the passenger census counts for Friday 29th 2013 show that a total of 345 passengers boarded trains while 355 alighted from trains, giving a total footfall for the day of 700, and comparison has also been made to some previous informal ad hoc counts by Association members.

3.2 An initial comparison, ignoring Saturdays, Sundays and all Bank Holidays, which leaves one with 253 working days per year and then multiplying the counted footfall for the day of 700 by 253 would give an annual equivalent footfall of 177,100.

3.3 This figure is very close to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) figure for Frinton-on-Sea for 2011-12 of 175,886. In fact, the official statistics for the past 15 years show basically static passenger numbers at Frinton, increasing from 163,206 to a peak of 189,510 in 2001-2 towards the end of the First Great Eastern franchise, before falling to 165,828 in 2009-10 during the National Express franchise; subsequently, the total footfall has shown some slight increase. It may be significant that the commencement of the National Express franchise coincided with the introduction of a new timetable in December 2004 which resulted in a noticeable deterioration in train services.

3.4 However, this figure of about 177,100 cannot possibly be a reasonable approximation to the correct number. Saturday travel, particularly to Colchester Town, can be considerable while the Summer and Bank Holiday day tripper business, which can be considerable, has also been ignored.

3.5 As an alternative, if we assume that a Saturday and a Sunday combined generate the same traffic as a weekday, then, allowing for the closure of the railways for two days at Christmas leaves 311 days per year giving an annual footfall of 217,700. This is some

24% higher than the official figure, a very significant difference.

3.6 However, this figure does not take into account the effect of Bank Holidays (other than Christmas), when there would be limited travel to work, but, since Frinton is a significant tourist destination, this would be counteracted by increased passenger numbers due to day trippers and visitors to families and friends who have retired to the coast; thus the overall variation may well not be too significant. Even so, none of the above takes account of the Summer holiday traffic which significantly increases loadings on certain services (see Appendix 3).

3.7 There is need therefore to consider the extent to which the observations of Friday 29th November are typical of a weekday. This is difficult to answer since there does not seem to be a 'typical' day for Frinton station; to start with there are normal daily variations with a Friday having a lower number in the peak due to some people taking a long weekend and/ or working at home. Also off-peak numbers are likely to be higher with people travelling for a weekend away.

3.8 Census were cheerfully informed by fellow commuters arriving for example arriving for the first train of the day that at least five season ticket holders who regularly used that first train were working at home on that Friday; these passengers, if travelling, would have increased the total footfall for the day by 1.4%.

3.9 Besides these daily variations, as mentioned above, the Summer brings large numbers of day trippers in July and August and, to a lesser extent, at half terms. Then in May/June and September there are English as a Foreign Language exchange student groups of school age and above from the Continent are using the train for visits to Colchester and further afield. Also during school terms, parties of primary school children visit Colchester while those in secondary education are more likely to visit London and sometimes vice versa..

3.10 To assist in comparing the figures obtained on November 29th with other days, Appendix 1 also gives a number of random counts of passenger numbers for various services at Frinton over the period December 2010 to November 2013 inclusive. There are three different situations here that need to be considered separately.

3.10.1 Morning peak services

i) These are services that give an arrival time at Liverpool Street before 10.00 a.m.; hence they comprise departures up to and including the 08.03. In fact the number of passengers boarding up peak-hour trains on Friday 29th November seems, for the most part, extraordinarily low, totalling only 127. The only recent evidence immediately available is for the 07.41 (see Appendix 1) which suggests a doubling of passenger numbers on this service on other days of the week. Clearly, this requires further investigation.

ii). It is interesting to note that is the 08.03 which, as will be discussed below, has maintained, and even increased, its loadings over the years. A longer-term perspective of peak-hour travel may be obtained by considering the total number of passengers boarding peak-hour services; official reports (Tendring District Council/ Public Transport Plans PTP5 and PTP6.) give the following for Frinton-on-Sea:

1978	260
1979	274
1981	295 (estimated), 274 (actual) ¹

¹ The count was carried out during August and the result adjusted to allow for some people being away on holiday. Hence for 1981, 274 was the actual figure obtained in August while 295 is the adjusted figure to

- iii). By 1984 (two years after withdrawal of the through Liverpool Street to Walton-on-the-Naze service and its replacement by a shuttle connecting service to Thorpe-le-Soken), the number had dropped to “around 200” (*based on a verbal report from Mr. Bernard Lewis, the then ticket clerk at Frinton, who was responsible for carrying out the headcount which took place over five days*). These figures suggest that:
- Until 1981 there was a gradually increasing number of peak-hour passengers
 - Over the two years following withdrawal of through services, there was a loss of around 30% of peak-hour passengers.
- iv). Significantly, by 1984, a very large increase in the amount of car parking at Thorpe-le-Soken was obvious, presumably as commuters sought to avoid the inconvenience of changing trains and which, in far too many instances, had resulted in considerable delay due to missed connections, a very frustrating situation.
- v). Subsequent timetable changes over the succeeding 25 years have resulted in the gradual deterioration in the standard of the service to Liverpool Street. This has included the withdrawal of main-line style electric multiple units (initially offering refreshment facilities) and their replacement with suburban rolling stock as well as the gradual increase in journey times due to the introduction of additional intermediate stops. The latter is most noticeable in the evening peak (departures from Liverpool Street between 17.00 and 19.00) where the fastest service in 2014 is slower than the slowest service in 1984.
- vi). For comparison with these historic figures, the corresponding number counted on 29th November totalled 127, 30 of whom had boarded the 08.03 which reaches Liverpool Street at the very late hour of 09.36; without this service the total would have been 97.

Regrettably, only very limited data is currently available for the early trains of the day. On 28th January and 29th July 1983 (both Fridays), 26 and 24 passengers respectively boarded the first departure, the 06.13 from Frinton; the total of 20 boarding the first two trains of the day in 2013 compares unfavourably with these figures. Also on 11th August 1983 (a Thursday), 72 passengers boarded the 07.20 from Frinton, probably lower than normal since this was in August when one would expect some regulars to be on holiday; again the total of 35 who boarded the 07.01 departure on 29th November 2013 compares unfavourably with this figure.

However, there is a significant amount of data available for the 07.41 and 08.03 departures from Frinton (precise times have varied slightly over the years).

- vii). In 1982-3, this service was boarded by 88 passengers from Frinton (average of 12 samples); the maximum recorded being over 120. By 2001, this number was down to 50 (average of 10 journeys, March to December) while on Monday 15th October and Tuesday 3rd December 2012, the numbers boarding were 31 and 26 respectively. So, are the 14 passengers observed boarding this service on 29th November a true reflection of the current situation or are loadings heavier on other days of the week?
- viii). The one bright spot concerns the 08.03 departure. In the three years since this service was introduced, patronage has steadily increased and on one recent journey earlier this year, the 4-car set was nearly full by the time the train reached Colchester (note that this service does not pick up passengers from Clacton).

Over the years, the function of the departure shortly after 08.00 has varied from being a late peak-hour train to Colchester Town (for a period extended to Liverpool Street as a very slow first off-peak service to London), to merely providing a connecting service at Thorpe-le-Soken into a slow Clacton to Liverpool Street service.

ix). In 1982-3, the number boarding at Frinton was 30 (average of 13 samples) while by 2000 the number had increased to an average of 36 (excluding one observation of 105 passengers boarding due to the presence of an exchange party from the Continent). Subsequently, numbers dropped to a very low level, about six or seven, with the imposition of peak-hour standard day return fares for journeys to Colchester and Chelmsford on this service. However, passenger numbers now boarding at Frinton regularly seem to be in the range 40 – 50, although only 30 was observed on 29th November.

x). Currently, this is the one good service of the day from the Walton line, providing:

- a fast direct service to Colchester North
- travel at a convenient time for students travelling to Colchester Institute
- for travel beyond Colchester, continuing as a direct service to London, calling only at the major stations of Witham and Chelmsford.

It is regrettable that there are not more services of this standard. The main drawback is that the journey time is still longer than it would have been over 30 years ago which, as today, included the time taken to join two portions; this service is due into Liverpool Street at 09.36 (the working timetable gives 09.34) but every time this train has been used, it has been standing outside Liverpool Street at the latest by 09.28 waiting for the 09.30 Norwich service to depart; timing allowance would seem to be very generous.

We now have the situation in 2013 where loadings on most peak-hour services have fallen, but for the 08.03 service they are the highest ever recorded; this clearly demonstrates that passengers are attracted to better quality services. What is unfortunate is that there is no equivalent return service in the evenings.

Clearly further work is needed to give a better estimate of peak-hour usage. For the purpose of the present exercise, a total daily peak-hour footfall prior to 09.00 of 153 will be used, this including passengers using both up and down trains. These passengers will be assumed to make a return journey later in the day which, without a great deal of additional work, cannot be distinguished from off-peak journeys at the same time. Thus 306 peak-hour journeys must be allowed for, leaving an off-peak footfall of 394.

3.10.2 Off-peak services (Excluding summer months)

i). It is understood that it has been generally assumed in the Rail Industry over many years that a Thursday is a typical weekday for passenger numbers and that a Friday would produce a very large increase in passenger numbers due to people travelling for a weekend away. However consideration of the figures in Appendix 1 suggests that this applies only to a much more limited extent at Frinton, although more data is probably needed to be quite certain of this.

Where there are many retired people, the day of travel has much less significance and they are able to choose the day to suit themselves. It has been found that, when travelling long distance to stay away, travel on a Tuesday is convenient as that seems to be the quietest day of the week for travel out of Euston, for example.

In fact, analysis of the off-peak up departures between 09.03 and 16.03 in Appendix 1 (ignoring those relating to Summer) suggest that overall, passenger numbers on a Friday are about 20% above the average for other weekdays; thus to give an overall figure for weekdays, the off-peak footfall could be reduced by as much as 16.6%. However, while some of these passengers will return on a Sunday, others will return on the Monday so the reduction should be rather less, 15% is probably more realistic.

- ii). One would expect the summer period to result in a general increase in traffic and this does indeed seem to be the case. In fact, with the exception of services bringing day trippers, the off-peak summer passenger numbers appear to be approximately the same as those obtained on 29th November so that for the duration of the summer the full daily off-peak figure of 394 will be assumed.
- iii). As an aside, it was very surprising to find that 15 people alighted from the 23.45 arrival on 29th November, a higher number than expected and one which demonstrates that there is a demand for late evening trains. This bears out reports from taxi drivers that, before this service was reintroduced, they were regularly called out to Thorpe-le-Soken station to meet people off the late evening service to Clacton. Investigation needs to be carried out to ascertain the possible demand for a later service connecting out of the 23.18 departure from Liverpool Street.

3.10.3 Off-peak services (summer months)

- i). Frinton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze together combine to form a significant tourist destination with continuous sandy beaches stretching nearly five miles from south of Frinton Golf Club to the Naze, north of Walton. Much of this coastline is easily accessible from Frinton and Walton stations, Walton station being particularly convenient as it is situated on the cliff top, only two minutes from the beach.

On a fine summer's day, 15,000 or more people crowd onto these beaches, most of these being day trippers. Consequently this can result in a much higher number of people than normal using the trains at this time of the year. The traffic commences with the end of the GCSE and 'A' level examinations and so lasts from the beginning of July through to the beginning of September, about two months of the year.

- ii). At one time the railway made special provision in order to attract day trippers to travel by train with additional trains calling at intermediate stations which did not normally have a direct service.² However, this is no longer the case so that passengers are expected to use the normal everyday services. This can result in considerable inconvenience if travelling from, for example, Ilford or Romford, so that numbers are considerably below the levels seen only, say, 30 years ago. In the case of travel to Frinton and Walton, there is the added deterrent of being forced to change trains additionally at Thorpe-le-Soken when travelling from main line stations. Nevertheless, significant numbers do still make the journey by rail, although most now come by road causing serious traffic congestion at certain times of the day as well as parking problems.
- iii). The overall number of passengers is generally higher in summer as can be seen in Appendix 1, but the exercise which the Association carried out in the summer of this year particularly set out to obtain an estimate of the numbers of day trippers. The main arrival time for day trippers is late morning so the 10.45 to 13.45 inclusive

2 Such additional summer services ran from Liverpool Street to Walton-on-the Naze until 1981 but were later reinstated, finally being withdrawn when National Express took over operation of the franchise from First Great Eastern some 10 years ago.

arrivals at Frinton were monitored on a number of days under various weather conditions, since the volume of this travel is heavily dependent upon the weather. The results of these observations are shown in Appendix 1 indicated by a superscript ². On one day, Friday 26th July, all four services were monitored at both Frinton and Walton.

- iv). The highest number observed alighting from any one service at Frinton was 103 from the 11.45 arrival on Thursday 1st August. Thus, allowing for those destined for Walton and allowing for a smaller number for Kirby Cross, the overall number on the train leaving Thorpe-le-Soken would have been in the region of 250. However higher numbers do occur; there have been occasions when travelling on these services, it has been deemed impracticable to walk down the train to carry out a count due to the number of standing passengers together with pushchairs and bicycles.
- v). To investigate the effect that these summer visitors have on overall footfall at Frinton, the figures for each of these four arrivals were averaged and the normal, “out of summer”, figure for the respective service deducted in order to avoid any double counting. The resulting totals for the four services showed an average increase of 131 per day, giving an increased footfall of 262 at Frinton (assuming that the same number returned in the evening).
- vi). On the one day when all four services were monitored, weather conditions were not particularly bad, but not particularly good, so probably an average summer day: the ticket clerk on duty at Walton observed that passenger numbers seemed to be somewhat lower than they had been earlier in the week when the weather had been better. At Frinton, the total alighting from these four services was 163; deducting the normal “out of summer” passengers left an excess of 122 passengers, 6.8% less than the figure of 131 which was obtained as described above; thus the latter figure is probably a reasonable average for this additional summer traffic.
- vii). As previously noted, the summer traffic at Frinton and Walton extends from the beginning of July until the start of the schools' Autumn term in September, a duration of 10 weeks. Neglecting Sundays, this period covers 60 days, so that the contribution that the summer day trippers make to the annual passenger footfall at Frinton amounts to 15,720, and this correction needs to be added to the total determined by the observations of 29th November.
- viii). Two interesting points arose from these observations. Firstly, the major destination for day trippers used to be Walton; however, we found that now the numbers alighting from trains are much more similar, with Walton receiving only slightly more day trippers by rail than Frinton.
- ix). Secondly, on the second day of the Clacton Airshow, no less than about 85 passengers alighted from the 11.45 arrival at Frinton (retimed to 11.48); together with the passengers for Walton, the total on the train leaving Thorpe-le-Soken would have been nearly 200, virtually all of whom would have changed trains there since the service originated at Clacton (Airshow service). Clearly, a very significant number of people were not going to the Airshow, but were simply coming down for a day out on the beach.

4. Analysis and Conclusion

4.1 The number of passengers joining peak hour services seems very low, while it seems that even the 08.03 departure was boarded by a lower than normal number. While it is known that some season ticket holders were working at home of the day of the survey, there is insufficient evidence to confirm the precise situation and clearly this requires

further investigation. Thus the total footfall, including passengers using down trains, of 153 per day, or 306 allowing for return journeys, for services before 09.00 will not be adjusted.

4.2 For peak-hour services there are 253 working days per year, allowing for weekends and Bank Holidays. Thus this gives a footfall for peak-hour passengers of 77,418 per year.

4.3 For off-peak summer services, neglecting day trippers, we have a footfall of 394 for 60 days, giving a total of 23,640. As determined above, day trippers would seem to contribute a further 15,720; in both cases, Sundays have been neglected.

4.4 For off-peak travel outside the summer, we need to reduce the figure of 394 by 15%, giving 335. Allowing 10 weeks, or 70 days for the summer and two days for Christmas closure, this leaves 293 days per year of which 42 will be Sundays. Thus for 251 days the off-peak footfall will be 84,085.

4.5 Bank holidays have been treated as a normal weekday with off-peak passengers only. It is difficult to be precise regarding variations due to these days, as some will be busier than a normal day while others will be less busy, hence no adjustment can be made without further evidence.

4.6 Thus, ignoring Sundays, this gives an overall footfall of 200,863, some 14.2% higher than the official figure for Frinton. However Sundays must generate some traffic with a service of 29 trains per day.

4.7 Regrettably no ORR evidence is currently available for Sunday usage so that no definite conclusion can be reached. However if, for example, one assumes a very modest footfall of 100 per Sunday, which averages just over 3 passengers per service or less than one-third of the weekday off-peak figure, this would contribute a further 5,200 to the total for the year giving an overall figure of 207,063, some 17.7% above the official estimate.

4.8 It is clear that the withdrawal of fast through services to Liverpool Street, followed by downgrading replacement services, has resulted in the loss of a considerable amount of business from Frinton-on-Sea. However, even today, provision of such services can generate significant additional traffic.

4.9 It is believed that this total obtained is a very conservative figure and that the true figure is somewhat higher due to various factors, particularly the lower than normal number of peak-hour passengers; also no attempt has been made to include group travel. Clearly further work is required to be able to refine these results.

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SEE APPENDICES ATTACHED