

“ONTRACK”

WALTON-ON-NAZE, FRINTON-ON-SEA, KIRBY X & THORPE-LE-SOKEN RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2009 – 2010

GENERAL MATTERS

- **Refranchising:** Following the takeover by the Department for Transport of the National Express East Coast franchise, it was announced that the current National Express East Anglia franchise would end on 31st March 2011. The re-franchising process has now commenced. The Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation document was issued by the Department for Transport in January 2010 and this seems to suggest that franchise periods could be longer than in the past. However, there has since been a change of Government and changes in policy could take place before the franchise is let. The Department is planning to issue the Invitation to Tender for the franchise in the near future with the successful bidder announced late in 2010.
- **Rolling Stock:** National Express is currently implementing a £185 million Service Improvement Plan which involves the purchase of 30 4-car electric multiple units of class 379 for the Stansted Express service with 17 4-car class 321 units cascaded from London Midland. The Government has recently announced that further orders for rolling stock will not be placed, but it is believed that construction of the class 379 units and the cascade of class 321's will go ahead.
- **Frinton Barriers:** When initially installed there were two failures of the barriers causing considerable disruption to road traffic; also there were instances of barriers being lowered before departure of a train from Walton resulting in passengers missing the train. However these problems seem to have been resolved.
- **Strike Action:** A dispute arose between NXEA and all three rail unions during August 2009 causing cancellation of many train services over a period of about three weeks. Agreement with the RMT and TSSA was finally reached on 13th August, but that with ASLEF dragged on into September. A further dispute and threat of strike action by RMT members occurred in April 2010, but this did not take place following legal action by NXEA.
- **Park-and-Ride for East Colchester:** Colchester Borough Council has, at intervals over a number of years, proposed a bus-based park-and-ride scheme in the area of the University for people travelling into Colchester from the east. However this would clearly have a negative impact on local travel on the parallel railway line into Colchester Town and the Association's view is that the railway should be used for such a scheme with parking provided at intermediate stations. The Council has also proposed to construct a road for buses only paralleling the railway from Hythe to St. Botolphs; this could affect the location of Colchester Town station although the plans for the new magistrates' court currently under construction clearly show provision for a second platform.

TIMETABLES

- **General:** There have been only minor changes to weekday timetables over the past year. Existing timetables remain unsatisfactory including problems with connections, frequencies, and late evening and Sunday services.
- **Short-Term Timetable Alterations:** We were very pleased that, following representations from the Association and from our associated Alresford Rail User Group, NXEA operated direct services from Walton-on-Naze to Clacton for visitors to the Clacton Airshow last August, and that for the four Sundays prior to Christmas 2009, the Walton-on-Naze to Thorpe-le-Soken shuttle service was extended to provide a service to Colchester Town. This was the first time for many years that Weeley and Hythe had had a Sunday rail service.
- **Future timetable plans:** Currently National Express East Anglia is preparing a new timetable to be implemented from December 2010 which is intended to form the base timetable for the new franchise. Very brief information has been issued but full details of the proposed timetable are due to be published at a meeting with user groups on 15th June with subsequent consultation meetings currently being arranged.

STUDIES & REPORTS

The Association has responded to the following:

- NXEA HLOS Timetable Consultation, June, 2009.
- Department for Transport “Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation”, January 2010. This response was also forwarded to Tendring District Council, Frinton & Walton Town Council, Essex County Council and all prospective parliamentary candidates for the Clacton Constituency.

ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATION AT MEETINGS, ETC.

- “Second Generation” Rail Utilisation Study – London & South-East, Passenger Focus, 11th July 2009.
- Meeting at NXEA Commercial Department, Olivers Yard, London, with Steve Knights and Jackie Gibbs, 13th July, 2009.
- The Association was represented by a stand at the launch of the lifeboat “James Stevens No. 14” at Titchmarsh Marina, Walton-on-Naze, 5th September, 2009.
- NXEA Rail User Group Forum, Liverpool Street, 20th October, 2009.
- Visit to NXEA Ilford Maintenance Depot, 13th November, 2009.
- Launch of NXEA Service Improvement Plan, Liverpool Street, 25th January, 2010 (postponed from 14th December 2009 due to power cable theft in the Chelmsford area and consequent train service disruption).
- The regular quarterly meetings of Tendring District Council Transport Forum have not been taking place.
- Meetings of the Sunshine Coast Line Action Group similarly have not been taking place.
- Ontrack has been represented at meetings of the Essex Rail Users Forum.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

- **Website:** The Association has commissioned a website to provide information to rail users, to help publicise services on the Colchester to Clacton and Walton lines and to raise the profile of the Association. The URL is www.ontrackrailusers.org.uk and has resulted in many favourable comments.
- **Newspapers:** There has been regular coverage by the local Gazette/ regional newspapers (file copies available on table for inspection).
- **LIFE:** The Association is included in the Essex Library ‘Local Information for Essex’ databases.

SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT

- **Frinton Property & Finance (FPC) and Chamber of Commerce and Trade have also printed copies of Newsletter in the past and provide reprographic facilities.** We are very grateful to David Foster of FPC for co-ordinating this and providing support.
- **We are also grateful for ROL Ltd for printing of newsletters and their ongoing support of future projects.**
- **We are very grateful to the large number of shops, libraries and other organisations** throughout the area served by the Colchester to Clacton and Walton railway line for providing facilities, at no cost, for publicising altered services in connection with the Clacton Airshow and the Sunday services to Colchester Town.

A. C. Baxter, Acting Hon. Sec.