

# The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

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## Issue 1/2015

We seek the **best for users** from the fast-changing railway scene by **working with all parties in the railway industry and with other relevant bodies in the development of the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) franchise on the Fen Line.**

**Growth – the story of the Fen Line!** No matter what the railways have done to cope, or so it seems, they never move quickly enough to keep pace. Longer trains, more trains, earlier trains, later trains, extra platforms – still not enough! If anyone ever wonders if success does indeed breed success, the Fen Line is the place to see it. Much of the growth is due to the way modern lives are increasingly led; today's creative, knowledge-based economy lends itself to clusters of innovation – step forward the big two Fen Line destinations, Cambridge and London. **House prices do the rest.**

A recent *Centre for Cities* study revealed the average price of a house in Cambridge was nearly *15 times* the average salary there. Yet despite that, Cambridge simply breeds jobs.

**Its University is world-class, of course, and so it is no surprise that the city continues to innovate its way into the future. London is in a league of its own; house prices and quality of life issues have long meant commuting is a necessity. Now it's true for Cambridge too.**

Neither Fen Line destination can cope with more road traffic (at least not without widespread demolition) but rail, with its crowd-shifting abilities, seems almost purpose-built for the job. We have pictured the Fen Line as a 'conveyor belt, linking homes and jobs' before and that description seems as apt now as it was then.

**Sure there's a downside. Never mind getting a seat, at peak times it's a matter of actually cramming yourself on board. This issue of *The Fenman* is much concerned with planning for the future - a future that starts now!**

[www.centreforcities.org](http://www.centreforcities.org)

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### One thing after another

First, on Thursday 13 November 2014, a lorry crashed into a sand train at the Downham Market bypass level crossing.

<http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/story/2014-11-13/lorry-and-train-collide-in-downham-market/>

On Wednesday 19 November, 2 CrossCountry trains hit a herd of horses on the line at Milton, between Cambridge and Waterbeach.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-30347531>

Then came the King's Cross engineering overrun – on Saturday 27 December trains were curtailed when Finsbury Park couldn't cope.

<http://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/Gallery/Christmas-2014-passenger-disruption-report-220a.aspx>

Finally, a signalling fault at Finsbury Park the following day, and overhead line problems near Royston on the day after, all added up to **three consecutive days of Fen Line woe!**

### THE FEN LINE



USERS ASSOCIATION

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## Combined response

FOUR major, inter-related rail consultations, all coming at once – time for concentrated thought!

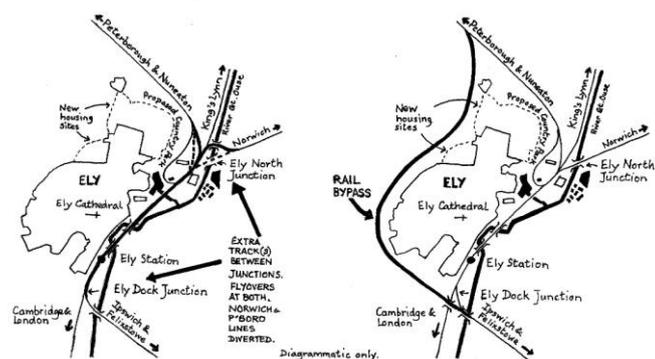
GTR's December 2015 timetable consultation (which is largely about starting the long process of making Brighton Main Line times fit with Thameslink services running from Peterborough and Cambridge from 2018) reinforces GTR's commitment to running 2 tph King's Lynn-King's Cross trains, come May 2017. North of Cambridge, extra trains will call at principal stations only (Ely, Downham Market and Lynn).

Number two is NR's "Improving Connectivity" study of utilising Swiss-style interval rhythm timetable 'Taktfahrplan' principles (whereby connections are paramount, though changing trains more often becomes necessary). It uses East Anglia as a case study. The third is NR's draft Anglia Route Study, an analysis of projected future traffic patterns across the region and a set of options for funders (largely Government) to choose from when they draw up their rail investment plans for CP6 (2019-2024).

**Finally, number four: the DfT is consulting on the future East Anglia Rail Franchise (EARF). Although this excludes GTR's King's Lynn-King's Cross services, it does cover most services currently run by Abellio Greater Anglia.**

The first three consultations were due to close before publication of this issue of *The Fenman*. That for the EARF closes on 16 March 2015. What to do? We put links on the FLUA website as soon as we had knowledge of them, giving members a chance to reply directly should they wish. Then, seeing how inter-related all four are, we went for a Combined Response to deal with them in a *consistent* way.

**Inter-related? Take Ely: a heavily-used commuter station, a congestion spot where passenger and freight trains mix (a growing problem as Felixstowe traffic booms) and a potential future splitting and joining point for portions of cross-country trains going east and west (more on that later). Patch and mend at Ely is ok for now, but what's the long-term answer?**



### More tracks (left) or rail freight bypass (right)?

The Anglia Route Study investigates widening the existing route through Ely with flyovers at both junctions (Option 32) versus providing a rail freight bypass on a new route to the west of the city (Option 33).

## New York, New York?

**ACTUALLY**, nobody knows yet what the Ely choice will be. And it's at Ely too where strange things would happen if you tried to make differing main lines mesh under a universal 'Taktfahrplan'. King's Cross is segueing into the Brighton beat - Liverpool Street's jazz is altogether another sound. Tie those two main routes together and the compromise creates total cacophony!

If Option 32 were built, one way to dim 'Taktfahrplan noise' would be to use the chance that the rerouting of the Peterborough and Norwich lines would give. "Improving Connectivity" conjures up a new 'Ely North' station at Queen Adelaide: every half hour, trains from all directions would meet at this hub and exchange passengers. But if Cambridge were made such a hub too, the journey from the University City to Ely would be *too quick* to make all this work (hubs have to be about 28 minutes apart - trust us on that). So an extra two minutes to reach 'Ely North' (and a five minutes stop there for Lynn trains) helps no end!

George Hudson, the nineteenth Century 'Railway King' wanted all lines to come to York - his cash was at stake. Bringing them all to confer at Adelaide would cost money, of course, but more than that is at risk. It would mean main-line journeys becoming longer - King's Lynn-King's Cross 8 minutes slower and Norwich-Liverpool Street 10 minutes slower. Of course, if Option 32 were chosen, it doesn't automatically require a station at Queen Adelaide!

**We could go on much more about "Improving Connectivity" but you get the drift. Before we leave it, though, the "transformational" average journey time savings it quotes for King's Lynn are mostly down to increased frequencies, like today's two-hourly Ely-Ipswich trains running every 30 minutes instead (change at Newmarket)!**

### Portions for all

THE ANGLIA Route Study envisages more portion working in future - think of the 0714 from King's Lynn (all-stations) waiting at Cambridge to join the 0725 from King's Lynn (stops at Downham and Ely only). These combine at Cambridge before going on to King's Cross as one - a clever use of the single lines and good use of capacity on the ECML south of Hitchin. The EARF canvasses trains to/from the Midlands and North similarly attaching and detaching portions (for/from Cambridge, Ipswich and/or Norwich) at the existing Ely station.

**Thankfully, it also suggests more trains between Ely and Cambridge, where the crowding is worse.**

### Big picture

BY NOW you're seeing this. A lot of serious thought indeed has gone into planning for the railway of the future and the thriving Fen Line has an important role in it. Putting the four consultations together, there seems plenty of excellent ideas, even if some are a bit 'over-imaginative.' But how do we judge what's good, what's not? Let's start with setting out what the big issues are, then we'll make clear what we'd like done about them. But first, the *Interview*.

## The Fenman Interview

### Andy Gibbs

#### Home station: Downham Market

➤ *How often do you use the Fen Line?*

**AG:** 5 days a week, 46 weeks a year.

➤ *Where do you travel and why?*

**AG:** I travel to King's Cross for work. I've only lived in Downham for four months, but I put in 10 years commuting from Dorset before that! Bus 63 from King's Cross drops me virtually outside my office at Blackfriars.

➤ *What's the service's worst aspects?*

**AG:** We have to look at overcrowding. I won't come back on the 1644 from King's Cross – it's well over capacity – so, reluctantly, Plan B is to use the 1707 from Liverpool Street. There's no realistic option but to go on this slower service. The single line north of Littleport creates a lack of resilience – other trains get in the way sometimes and lead to delays. For someone who's 6'1" tall, the rolling stock isn't of the right calibre, and it's getting a bit tired; the refurbished stock does give a little more legroom, but it's a cosmetic refurb and it's no substitute for better trains.

➤ *What's its best point?*

**AG:** This flies in the face of some of what I've just said, but the reliability is pretty good. And I thought the recent horses incident was dealt with reasonably – having to wait 20 minutes for a replacement bus wasn't too bad in those circumstances.

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

**AG:** An increase in the frequency to alleviate overcrowding. Withdrawing the peak stops at Royston and Letchworth would help; it's difficult to understand why the off-peak trains run non-stop, but just when we need to get to work, and when the trains are at capacity anyway, why these extra two stops?

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

**AG:** I do not want to see any reduction in through services to work ["Improving Connectivity" please note] - I'm sure I speak on behalf of most commuters when I say the ability to work and/or sleep is a sanity saver! The vagaries of connections lead to a decrease in service reliability, everybody's life suffers – we need our through trains! Once I'm on a train, I want to stay on it! Looking at the Thameslink proposals and, with my office in Blackfriars, I want to ask when are we going to have through Downham Market-Blackfriars trains to have parity with our Cambridge colleagues?

## Four million p.a. and still rising!

HERE'S the number of passenger journeys made to/from Fen Line stations during 2013/4, according to official ORR estimates.

|             |           |       |                            |
|-------------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|
| King's Lynn | 913,458   | +4.3% | <i>compared to 2012/13</i> |
| Watlington  | 131,742   | -4.0% | <i>err, really?</i>        |
| Downham Mkt | 460,056   | +1.6% | <i>Gt Yarmouth-sized</i>   |
| Littleport  | 225,024   | +3.9% | <i>tidy growth</i>         |
| Ely         | 1,976,134 | +5.2% | <i>nearly two million!</i> |
| Waterbeach  | 344,722   | +2.7% | <i>biggest unstaffed.</i>  |

### Fen Line stations TOTAL

4,051,136 +4.1%

King's Cross trains – required by the DfT to be half-hourly by May 2017 – run direct to two of the country's busiest stations. A conveyor belt between homes and jobs!

Cambridge 9,824,136 +4.1%

King's Cross 29,823,715 +4.8%

*Data provisos, limitations, more numbers, etc at -*

[http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/excel\\_doc/0018/15363/station-usage-2013-14-data.xls](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/excel_doc/0018/15363/station-usage-2013-14-data.xls)

## Big issues

WE ALL HAVE our grumbles: we know, you tell us! Not everyone has the same troubles, but some things come up time after time after time.

Three issues stand out from the crowd:

- *the fragility of peak connections at Cambridge at the few times when a change there is still required to/from King's Cross;*
- *the increasing crowding, especially between Ely and Cambridge;*
- *the frustration of not stopping at big, near-to-the-line work, business, and education sites in Cambridge and in parts of London.*

IN BRIEF, as we said above, the Liverpool Street route doesn't mesh well with King's Lynn-King's Cross (at least not north of Littleport where the single line sections are) and recasting timetables could wreak havoc. For what we politely call 'crowding' try the 1644 King's Cross-King's Lynn (departs Cambridge at 1740). It's 8-cars to Cambridge, 4-cars thereafter, and comes with a mix of King's Cross-King's Lynn, King's Cross-Cambridge, and Cambridge-King's Lynn flows (for Lynn read 'any Fen Line station') – we dare you to try to find a seat on it! Rush through well-connected Finsbury Park, cruise past the Biomedical Campus (Addenbrookes), flash by the Business and Science Parks, and see all those jobs and all that commerce 'under your nose,' so near, yet so far!

**Still following us? Right, we know the issues then, what do we want to see done about them?**

Join us from only £4.50 a year! FLUA Membership, 67 Goodwins Road, KING'S LYNN, Norfolk, PE30 5PE or [www.flua.org.uk/membership](http://www.flua.org.uk/membership)

*Since we have introduced Corporate Membership, our scope now includes commercial and industrial companies, property developers, estate agents and many other bodies and organisations interested in the Fen Line. As well as to members, The Fenman is distributed to relevant Ministers, MPs, Councillors, senior Civil Servants, and rail industry decision-makers.*

### Our objectives

FOLLOWING ON from identifying the issues (page 3), three objectives were developed to give us something (ok, horrible pun coming) *objective* to evaluate the four inter-related consultations consistently.

These are our three objectives:

*\* replacement of fragile connections at Cambridge to/from King's Cross in the AM and PM peaks with through trains to/from King's Cross;*

*\* relief of the increasing crowding, both south and north of Cambridge, especially between Ely and Cambridge;*

*\* improved accessibility to emerging clusters of economic and social activity located on or close to the King's Lynn-Cambridge-King's Cross route.*

**Please excuse the rather formal language used, it's just that it helps make things so much clearer when you have to think it through, word by word!**

### Round-up

NO, we're not advertising weedkiller! It's time to put those four inter-related consultations to the test. How do they advance our objectives? Do they advance our objectives?

There's a lot in their pages that we haven't told you about. Be fair, over 250 of them in closely written text – they can't be covered in a page or two! What we have done is try to explain the main points. For the full story, check out the FLUA website or contact **Andy Tyler** and ask for a copy of our 20-page Combined Response. Remember, that part of it which covers the EARF consultation is subject to any comments members wish to make, provided we get them in writing (email or post) before 6 March 2015.

### Enough of chitchat. What's the bottom line?

*Getting rid of those fragile connections at Cambridge (first objective)* – we support GTR's 2 tph King's Lynn-King's Cross service, committed to run "throughout the day" from May 2017. We know there'll have to be a couple of off-peak gaps to allow freight trains to run; we know that the extra trains are unlikely to serve Watlington, Littleport, and Waterbeach because of infrastructure constraints (we will continue to campaign for more stops at those stations). We understand that the same constraints mean the King's Lynn-Liverpool Street extras may not run north of Ely (we ask for them to carry on serving Ely southwards); we support stopping and semi-fast portion working in the direction of peak flows. We do not support the "Improving Connectivity" case study, which would necessitate changing at Cambridge more often.

*Cutting down the crowding, especially between Ely and Cambridge (second objective)* – we support the Route Study suggestion of an earlier train from Birmingham to help carry more Ely passengers into Cambridge before 0759; we support its suggestion of lengthening the 0725 portion of the 0714/0725 King's Lynn-King's Cross train to 8-cars (the stations it does stop at have 8-car length platforms) joining, as now, with the stopping portion at Cambridge and running forward as 12-cars to King's Cross. We know there may be issues with this further south and that these will have to be addressed in the future East Coast Main Line Route Study; we hope to play a constructive part in that process. The EARF consultation suggests diverting the Liverpool-Nottingham-Norwich service to Cambridge – we support *any* extra services between Ely and Cambridge (from May 2017 the committed 2 tph GTR King's Lynn-King's Cross service will help as well). We suggest Cambridge-Stansted Airport services start back at Ely. We ask for more trains to call at Waterbeach.

We do not support the "Improving Connectivity" case study which would see the frequency of trains between Ely and Cambridge drop to 2 tph (slower journeys too)! We would welcome any proposals to re-double part or all of the single line sections north of Littleport.

*Improved accessibility to nearby employment and business centres (third objective)* – GTR's committed 2 tph King's Lynn-King's Cross service will help with frequency; we ask that these trains serve the proposed Chesterton station (adjacent to North Cambridge employment areas) as we think the extra time to stop there is outweighed by the tremendous accessibility gains. We ask that a stop for Fen Line trains at Finsbury Park be investigated (Old Street 'Silicon Roundabout' 9 minutes by Northern City Line; Oxford Circus 10 minutes, Piccadilly Circus 15 minutes, by Underground; from 2018, eight Thameslink services per hour to St. Pancras International, Farringdon, Blackfriars, London Bridge). We support the proposed Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford 'East West Rail' project; this might permit a new station at the Cambridge Biomedical Campus (Addenbrookes) by providing the necessary tracks and it might possibly create a new, faster route between Cambridge and King's Cross.

The "Improving Connectivity" approach as demonstrated by the case study, suggests slower journeys between King's Lynn and Cambridge and between King's Lynn and King's Cross; unsurprisingly we do not support this.

It became increasingly clear to us as we worked through the four inter-related consultations that major works would have to be undertaken in the Ely area if the forecast long-term growth in freight flows from Felixstowe occur. We express a preference for a rail bypass of Ely (Anglia Route Study Option 33) as we think this would be less likely to cause considerable disruption to passengers than the work which would be needed to widen the railway throughout the Ely area (Option 32).

### Too concise? Read the full 20-page version!

#### Ten Years Ago

**"In the real world, the overcrowding is becoming more and more a pressing issue. Literally." That's what we said in issue 1/2005. Since then we've seen huge efforts to cope with the growth, and still more and more people keep on coming.**

### National significance

"Chesterton Rail Station – as announced by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister the government will provide £44 million between 2014-15 and 2016-17 to build a new rail station at Chesterton, linked to Cambridge Science Park" states the *National Infrastructure Plan* (December 2014). It continues "East West Rail – the government will consider the outputs of the Network Rail study into the East West Rail central section (Bedford to Cambridge) as part of the planning for Control Period 6 (2019-2024)." The Bedford-MK-Oxford section is in hand.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-plan-2014>

### Enhanced compensation

SEASON TICKET holder? Persistent delays? See this.  
<http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/delay-repay/enhanced-compensation/>

### STOP PRESS!

FUNDING AGREED for Ely Southern Bypass road/station level crossing work.

<http://www.gcgp.co.uk/2015/01/millions-pounds-secured-growth/>

**FLUA diary 2015**  
**Saturday 28 November**  
AGM, King's Lynn.