

## REPORT TO BURNHAM TOWN COUNCIL FROM TRANSPORT REP

*November 2018*

### RAIL UPDATE

On 11 October 2018, the Right Hon. Mark Francois (M.P. for Rayleigh & Wickford) introduced an **adjournment debate** to express anger at the poor quality of our local railway services. Describing Abellio Greater Anglia as “a glorified bus service loosely disguised as a railway”, he went on to call for the resignation of Managing Director Jamie Burles.

I'm covering this in greater detail within my “Travellers' Tales” column for the Burnham Focus (December issue). Perhaps BTC might feel drawn to enquire whether our own constituency M.P. supports the efforts of his parliamentary colleague? A focus on deficiencies at Wickford could be very helpful. The elderly, the disabled, and those with small children are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of lifts and the tight connection times. Around 8 p.m. the staff lock up and go home. Passengers are left out in the cold - and not in the best of humour if the train from London arrives late and fails to link up with a branch line departure.

**Network Rail** is currently working on a national programme to divert footpaths away from pedestrian crossings over the railway. The aim is to improve safety by sending walkers on more circuitous routes making use of nearby bridges over or under the track. However, plans to close Crossing E40 (Creeksea Place #1) were withdrawn after I (and, presumably, others) drew attention to a high flood risk beneath the railway bridge at Creeksea. At ‘Clears Crossing’ (Chestnut Close) planning permission was secured for a new footbridge. However, work did not commence and, according to the MDC planning portal, went stale on 6 November 2018.

The ‘**Santa Express**’ will run on Saturday 8th December 2018 in connection with the Burnham Christmas Fayre. Co-ordinated by the Community Rail Partnership, this specially decorated train will leave Wickford at 1336. On arrival at Burnham it will be met by Santa's elves who will lead the way to the Fayre. Children on the train will receive Christmas activity pack, sweets, and lucky dip. There is no need to pre-book: normal train tickets will be valid.

**Burnham Railway Station** continues to win accolades and is a credit to the work of our local staff and to the many volunteers who help maintain a welcoming gateway to the town. Sadly, Maldon District Council takes no part in the Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership. It would be good to see

some official backing (not necessarily financial) from the District for initiatives designed to bring more visitors here by rail.

## **BUS UPDATE**

I attended an Essex County Council (ECC) **briefing for parish transport representatives** in October. This proved to be a fairly quiet meeting. We learnt of an ongoing dialogue within the County Council: is it better to let bus contracts by the financial year or by the educational year? Splitting the tenders into two baskets means that ECC loses out on the greater purchasing power which could result from a single annual bidding round.

I continue to press for a **Child Bus Rover** ticket, something I believe would be valued by grandparents travelling on a concessionary pass - currently they are charged adult rates if purchasing Essex day rovers for any accompanying children over five years of age. I'm told that rover tickets are currently under review by ECC in consultation with the operators.

**The Dengie Hundred Bus Users' Group** (DHBUG) held an open meeting at the end of October. There were further comments from members who would like to see BTC facilitate provision of a bus shelter in the vicinity of the Clocktower, as well as continued requests for an additional stop at the far end of the High Street.

An ECC officer explained that the Essex part of the '**RIDE**' project was now coming to an end. Much had been learnt about how young people might be encouraged, through social media, to make greater use of bus services. DHBUG officers intend to submit a report on their members' experiences of '**RIDE**'. This will be addressed directly to the Department of Transport.

**First Bus** failed to field a representative and were roundly criticised for this and other recent absences, e.g. from the meeting for parish transport representatives. It is clear from recent reports to shareholders that the company is currently engaged in a round of cost reductions. These include network rationalisation, office centralisation, phasing out cash payments, replacing paper records with electronic accounting systems, plus various economies of scale. Investment is directed towards "regions that genuinely offer a partnership" and vehicles are dispersed accordingly.

Growing numbers of passengers make regular use of **smartphones** to display "real-time" information about bus services. Their experiences are varied. Some are well satisfied; others express frustration at the instability, ambiguity and unreliability of currently available applications. But these are early days: technology advances speedily, yet erratically. The government is currently

consulting on future options, to ensure maximum benefit from open data systems. My prognosis is that the situation will improve significantly over the next few years, though at some cost to the end user (such as accepting advertisements or paying a premium charge to a third-party provider).

DHBUG continues to **progress-chase** a range of issues, including:-

- 1) Reduced availability of **printed timetable leaflets & booklets**, lack of information at bus stops, problems with sheets overflowing or slipping within cases, and delays in updating.
- 2) **Congestion** arising from inconsiderate parking: more enforcement is needed – but by whom? This is persistent drag upon bus punctuality.
- 3) The protected area around **bus bays** is insufficient for vehicles used on the 31B/31X to park parallel to the kerb. This creates problems for the less able-bodied, as does the inability of minibuses with outward opening doors to position themselves against raised curbs.
- 4) Curtailment and/or diversion of bus services on account of **road works & special events**. DHBUG committee recognises that this is a challenging issue and has offered to post notices at bus stops on request from operators or ECC. To date, no requests have been received.
- 5) Ongoing debate as to the best balance between fixed timetables and **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)**, with particular focus on how to facilitate multi-stage journeys embracing both methodologies.
- 6) How best to service the **first/last mile** - more ‘around town’ routes (such as the D4 serving Maple Way) are needed.
- 7) **Ergonomics** - improvements are needed to help boost the clarity and elegance of information displays (timetables, network diagrams, “next bus” displays, etc.,).
- 8) **Miscellaneous** complaints - DHBUG cannot make much progress without specific details (date & time, location & direction of travel).

DHBUG has begun to pick up some signs of anxiety from local residents called to attend outpatient clinics at **Braintree Community Hospital**. If a patient dependent upon public transport is called to a 9 a.m. appointment, they would need to leave Burnham on the first bus of the day (before 6 a.m.).

Lastly: Sandon **‘Park & Ride’** will be operating on Sundays in December.

Many of the above issues are featured in greater detail on the DHBUG website [dhbug.org.uk](http://dhbug.org.uk) which also contains a wealth of information about local bus matters.

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