PETERBOROUGH – ELY – NORWICH RAIL USERS GROUP

Newsletter – July 2026

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Welcome to our summer newsletter. This edition includes:

- Performance over the past three months
- Cambridge South is open!
- Norfolk Rail Group meeting
- A further catering trial: Stansted Airport - Norwich
- Journey experiences including Thetford to Spalding and Nottingham, and Lowestoft to London King's Cross

PERFORMANCE

In **April** there were only two EMR cancellations at the Norwich end of the route.

By contrast, 40 services were cancelled at the Norwich end of the Liverpool-Norwich route during **May,** 10 of them on a single day. Three were cancelled all the way between Liverpool and Norwich, 10 between Nottingham and Norwich, 24 between Ely and Norwich. It would appear to the observer that 10 cancellations could have been avoided with different staff rosters.

In **June** there were 47 Liverpool-Norwich cancellations at the Norwich end of the route, 18 between Nottingham or beyond and Norwich; 22 of them between Ely and Norwich.

These numbers do not include trains which started out from Norwich but did not reach their scheduled destination nor those which reached Norwich but had not started their journey at their scheduled starting point.

On Saturday 9 May a points failure at Thetford led to replacement buses for a while to add to the disruption caused by planned engineering work and rail replacement buses west of the town.

As temperature records for the month were broken on 26 May there was significant disruption on our route, often with delays of 30 to 45 minutes but sometimes longer.

A 20 mph speed restriction was in place between Lakenheath and Shippea Hill while Cambridge to King's Lynn trains were suspended due to signalling problems between Cambridge and Cambridge North.

Separately, a bridge strike between Leicester and Nuneaton affected XC services with the 1822 Birmingham New Street to Stansted Airport noted to be running 122 minutes late and terminating at Cambridge.

On 3 July there was huge disruption at Cambridge with no trains able to serve the station for most of the day due to damage to overhead wires. GA Norwich – Stansted Airport trains were only operating between Norwich and Ely, and XC trains between Birmingham and Stansted were only running as far as Ely.

NORFOLK RAIL GROUP

PENRUG attended a hybrid meeting of the Norfolk Rail Group on 17 April. Those present were conscious of both the ongoing changes affecting the rail industry and the reform in the structure of local government due to be implemented in April 2028.

Two points came up which specifically related to our line. Firstly, the update from GA mentioned the operator was continuing to work with Network Rail to secure step-free access for the westbound platform at Wymondham under the government's Access for All scheme.

The second point was a brief discussion about the inconvenience to passengers waiting to board EMR trains at Norwich. It was the long established practice not to unlock the doors until shortly before departure resulting in a frantic scramble to board, find seats and space for luggage. Unfortunately, no one from EMR was in attendance in order to respond.

Updates were also provided on the exploratory work to assess the feasibility of new stations at Broadland Business Park near Norwich and at West Winch near King's Lynn.

GBR ANGLIA

As the rail industry moves towards the creation of Great British Railways (GBR), a new leadership team has been in place for GBR Anglia since 14 May, bringing together c2c, Greater Anglia and Network Rail Anglia. Under public ownership the aim is to have an integrated railway with one potential benefit being a more coordinated approach to the planning of engineering work.

In the coming weeks and months the GA brand will be phased out although the 'Stansted Express' name will live on. It has been emphasised again that the restructure will not trigger any changes to timetables and ticketing.

In the latest episode of GA's Life on Rails podcast Jamie Burles, MD of GBR Anglia discusses what we can expect. The new business unit is based on two of the best performing operators but further improvements will be sought including making stations more accessible.

AT SEAT CATERING

In a surprise move early in May, GA quietly began another trial of refreshment facilities on selected Norwich to Stansted Airport journeys, hoping to tap into the summer holiday market.

This follows a three month trial up to Christmas 2025 which was a bold move by GA but one which must have been affected by little or no publicity at stations and on trains. True, overcrowding sometimes prevented the refreshment trolley moving down the train but if a Norwich bound service shed many of its passengers at Ely, it was not considered worthwhile looking for custom for the remaining hour of the journey.

Curiously, departures screens and announcements at Cambridge flagged up the availability of refreshments for XC services to Birmingham but not GA trains to Norwich. The good news for the latest trial is that we have seen departure screens at Norwich and Cambridge mentioning refreshments are available. There are posters at stations too.

The trolley service is due to be available on these trains:

Norwich to Stansted Airport: 09:27 - 10:27 - 11:27 - 13:27 - 14:27 - 15:23

Stansted Airport to Norwich: 11:46 - 12:46 - 13:46 - 15:46 - 16:46 - 17:48

As usual, the message is - use it or lose it!

CATCHING A TRAIN TO THE COAST?

Great Yarmouth is only one change of train away from Wymondham, Attleborough, Thetford and Brandon, but it is a considerable walk from the station to the beach. However, from 6th July till the end of August the Wherry 100 bus will again run regularly between Great Yarmouth station and the seafront via Market Gates in the town centre.

Operated by Ambassador Travel and promoted by the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, it will run for a longer season this year and is very handy for visitors to the coast.

For more information including the timetable see the Wherry Lines website.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Cambridge

The final EWR consultation was launched on 14 April with proposals including:

- An accelerated construction programme

- A new entrance on Clifton Road to the east of the main station at Cambridge
- A new station, Cambridge East to be built on the line to Newmarket ahead of the completion of the Oxford line
- A new train care centre at Fulbourn, also on the Newmarket line

A further development was the announcement early in June of plans for 10,000 homes on the site of Cambridge City Airport which is to be sold. The whole project including the new station is being branded as 'Cambridge East'.

The consultation ran until 9 June. The line to Oxford expected to open by mid to late 2030s with up to five trains an hour.

Cambridge South

Trains on our route operating to and from Stansted Airport are now calling at Cambridge South which is next to the Cambridge biomedical campus and hospitals including Addenbrooke's. On 11 May the Department for Transport confirmed that the opening of Cambridge South station would take place on 28 June. It is the first Great British Railways branded station and has up to nine trains an hour to the main station at Cambridge. These include Cross Country Stansted Airport-Birmingham trains and off-peak trains on Greater Anglia's Stansted Airport-Norwich route.

For more information including FAQs see the Greater Anglia website.

Ely

Three more incidents involving road vehicles occurred at the notorious Bridge Road in Ely, two of them on consecutive days. On 18 May a tractor hit the railway bridge and on 19 May a van was seriously damaged after becoming wedged under the bridge. On 12 June a van lost its roof at the same location. On each occasion major disruption appears to have been avoided.

Hereward: Days out by Rail

Hereward CRP has produced some fliers to inspire day trips on the line. For more information, see their website.

In conjunction with Community Rail Week 2026, a 'Try a Train' heritage visit for schoolchildren travelling between March and Ely was organised on 3 June, organised by the Community Rail Partnership.

Norwich

Visitors to Norwich will again be able to explore the city this summer using First's open top bus. The 100 service operates hourly seven days a week until 12 September. For those arriving by train the nearest stop is on the right hand side of Prince of Wales Road just past the Foundry Bridge. For more information and a route map see the First Bus website.

Whittlesea

We have mentioned before the increase in passengers at Whittlesea station and it is worth taking stock of the three additional stops XC introduced there in 2025. These were:

1652 SX Birmingham – Cambridge (from May 2025)

2022 Mon-Sat Birmingham – Cambridge (from December 2025)

1624 Mon-Sat Stansted - Birmingham (from December 2025)

XC are looking at the feasibility of a small number of additional calls to serve the growth area around Whittlesea station, in response to local stakeholder aspirations to match the significant station improvements being planned by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority / Fenland District Council.

Wymondham

In our last newsletter we mentioned GA were providing extra journeys between Norwich and Ely/Cambridge. Please note that one of those extra trains, the 0808 Norwich to Cambridge does NOT call at Wymondham.

GA report that as well as planting platform containers, the station adopter team have introduced a water butt, two composting bins and some safe places for hibernating wildlife.

JOURNEY EXPERIENCES

Thetford to Spalding and return – 23 April 2026

All four of my trains on 23 April turned up and were on time to the minute. All specified facilities at Thetford station were available to passengers, though some car parking spaces will be out of use for the next five months while work is done on the roof of the listed buildings.

I bought my tickets before leaving home from Realtime Trains with no problems and I refilled my water bottle from the dispenser on Platform 1 at Peterborough.

My first journey through the Werrington dive-under was in the luxury of a re-upholstered class 158 diesel. Having worked near Spalding some decades ago, I was amazed at how much housing development has taken place over the last mile or so on both sides of the tracks approaching the station. Not to mention the expanse of retail parking spaces where many of the sidings used to be and the block-paved market square.

Like Thetford, Spalding station now has some commissioned murals on its historic brickwork. It has a superior-looking bug hotel and wild flower area too. Network Rail did honour its commitment to install a lift on both platforms having abruptly removed the previous step-free access to Platform 2. My return journey was also through the dive-under, confirming an impression that, having reached the bottom, drivers rather

enjoy accelerating upwards. The new seats in the refreshed 2-car Turbostar were comfortable and the customer service excellent.

As always, almost continuous announcements of the “see it” variety were something of a distraction at Peterborough itself. I assume that the use of Platforms 5 and 6 by some Spalding trains results from the transfer of some container trains from Felixstowe, often involving passage through Platform 5, to London Gateway, using Platform 1.

For the last part of my journey, the 0851 from Liverpool was one of the 3-car Turbostars which were once used on Norwich-Cambridge local services. These sets badly need a deep clean and fresh padding but belong to a different owner and seem unlikely to get the Porterbrook treatment. For the first time on my travels since the lockdown period, the conductor walked through the train after Ely collecting litter.

John Saunders

Thetford to Leicester and return – 30 April 2026

While waiting on Thetford station for the 0852 from Norwich on 30 April, I was asked by a man who had just paid his fare at the booking office whether there was a toilet on Platform 1 as well as Platform 2. From watching him walk along the platform, I could see why he would prefer to cross the footbridge once rather than three times on his way to Ipswich, changing at Norwich. As he began the climb, he shouted back at me, “A lift would be nice,” giving me a new perspective on an old problem.

Everything worked on both trains to Leicester, which were clean and punctual – a good start. Murals seem to be more common at stations these days. After Thetford and Spalding, the footbridge at Leicester is now enriched with huge photographs of individual members of the Windrush generation who have made a significant contribution to the life, work or medical services of this country.

My plan was to return on the 1222 from Birmingham, due to leave Leicester at 1313. The train arrived a few minutes late. We all got on. We all sat down. And we all waited. After a while, the conductor explained that a freight train had broken down and that we should be held in Leicester station for “hopefully not too long.” The train was cancelled about 20 minutes later.

The screens and announcements told us that the 1322 from Birmingham would be going to Stansted Airport as usual but I became suspicious when it stopped at the extreme north end of Platform 1. Its conductor gave the same first message as his colleague but it was cancelled about 15 minutes later. We were then told that buses were available from the station entrance as far as Peterborough, while passengers for Cambridge and the airport should take the next train to London.

At about 1500 the Platform 1 screen indicated that the “delayed” train might go to the airport. Once the conductor had checked with control, he clarified that a rescue locomotive had been detached and that his train would eventually go to Melton, where it would wait till the route ahead was clear.

Not relishing the thought of a lengthy bus journey in the hot sun and doubting how long clearance might take, I decided to hop on the next train to Nottingham, finding myself standing with a dozen others in the bar area of a Meridian till Loughborough, where a kind young man who could see down the length of the carriage, advised me that a seat had become vacant. I gratefully took it, finding myself surrounded by fans on their way to a football match, animated but not in any way troublesome. They were talking about what they paid to watch various matches, despite being members of some sort of “first refusal” club.

Having “split my ticket” at Stamford, I assumed that I should have to pay extra for the journeys from Leicester to Nottingham and thence to Peterborough. But one of the seven staff at the barriers or waiting to issue tickets to those who had arrived without, who seemed to have some authority, took my mobile phone, examined all the messages and insisted that, as I had paid for the full journey from Thetford to Leicester and back and as “everyone is accepting Cross Country tickets this afternoon,” this was not the case, but, to give reassurance, he would write me authority to travel on the next train to Thetford. I now realise that “split ticketing” is so mainstream that you will not be stranded during disruption and can still use alternative routes without penalty. I later discovered that I should not have arrived any earlier had I stuck to the normal route.

The screens warned us that the 1351 from Liverpool had fewer coaches than usual and it duly ran in with three instead of six, but that did not affect passengers travelling only east of Nottingham. As far as Peterborough I sat next to a lady who was taking a big bag of shopping home from Nottingham to Biggleswade, having “split her ticket” at Grantham. The train was clean and punctual to the minute, while our conductress was cheerful, very conscientious and very visible, restoring the “feel good” factor despite the delay.

John Saunders

Thetford to Newark and return – 7 May 2026

Thetford has long enjoyed a Cheap/Off-Peak Day Return fare to Newark but it has not been valid till 0930, so I have previously “split my ticket” at Peterborough. The new timetable introduced in December makes it easier to start the journey at 1020 than at 0920 so I bought one ticket for the whole return journey on 7 May. I was surprised to find that, with no increase in fare, that ticket is now valid for a month and also valid into Newark Castle. The system would not let me buy it without accepting a seat reservation from Peterborough to Newark on the outward journey. But, in the event, I simply sat in a convenient empty seat, of which there were plenty in coach C. I enjoyed a very pleasant journey.

I had not previously realised that the occasional through service from Lincoln Central to London now leaves Newark Northgate station immediately after the hourly service from Aberdeen or Edinburgh to London, which made us around six minutes late and, by coincidence, my arrival in Thetford was also slightly late by the same amount. One curiosity is that 5-car Azumas always use the extreme front part of the platform,

giving several passengers making the Huntingdon connection a long and hurried walk from the south end of Platform 1 at Peterborough to Platform 2. New track and point-work north of Ely station showed the result of the weekend blockades and there was nothing to fault on either leg of the journey.

John Saunders

Thetford to Nottingham and return – 12 May 2026

Two pigeons sang a duet as I waited for the 0920 from Thetford on 12 May, perhaps promising a fault-free journey in one of the refurbished class 158 diesel units, which it was till Allington (a few miles west of Grantham) where the driver had to get down on the track and inspect the train following reports from “a witness” of a strange smell. All turned out to be “perfectly fine” and the conductor’s estimated arrival time into Nottingham was more accurate than the one on the platform screens.

If you have not been to Nottingham recently, you may be surprised to learn that, though the new bus station and central library have been open for some time, the wreckers have still to attack many of the structural concrete beams in the rest of the former Broadmarsh shopping centre.

I returned on the 1051 from Liverpool with everything working on both journeys, catering west of Grantham as planned and efficient, visible conductors.

John Saunders

Lowestoft to London King’s Cross – 28 May 2026

On 28 May I had a meeting in Somers Town, North London, for which I found it convenient to travel via King’s Cross. On this occasion I was able to catch the new Lowestoft - Cambridge through service at 0634. The station screen at the entrance to platform 2 showed ‘Cambridge’ and the journey was punctual. The electronic indicator in the train was stuck and kept informing us that it was going to ‘Lowestoft’. The conductor and driver used the public address system to advise us of the next station and the fact that the train was indeed going on to Cambridge.

There was a nine minute wait in platform 4 at Norwich (which was also announced by the conductor) - time to buy an EDP or a coffee but probably not both - and we then continued punctually to arrive in the bay platform in Cambridge station at 0851.

I had planned to catch the 0910 to King’s Cross, but it had been cancelled. This news was given by the conductor on our train who then said that we might be able to catch the 0854 from platform 2 (as several of us managed to do) but also gave us three other alternatives over the next 30 minutes to reach London. The 0854 turned out to be a stopping train calling at almost all stations.

An incident at Welwyn Garden City meant that our train was held at Stevenage and

then diverted by the Hertford Loop but when we arrived Finsbury Park our driver announced that he was ‘out of time’. There was a short delay until a new driver took over and we finally drew into King’s Cross at 1040 instead of 1000. We learned later that there had been quite a serious accident near Welwyn North.

In normal circumstances, however, this is a useful alternative route to the capital.

Trevor Garrod

Norwich to Lincoln – 26 June 2026

Malcolm travelled to Lincoln on a very hot Friday 26 June, leaving Norwich on the 1052 Liverpool service. That was a very full 2-car Turbostar with standing passengers, on which the air-conditioning in the rear coach had failed. By Ely the conductress announced that the air-con in the front coach had also failed. Malcolm was really pleased to be leaving the train at Peterborough. As they approached that station, the conductress announced that the train would terminate at Nottingham. Malcolm felt that she had done a good job in very difficult circumstances.

His onward journey was also in a 2-car Turbostar but this one had working air-con, leaving Peterborough slightly late at 1250 but then delayed at Sleaford and approaching Lincoln by a late container train. Malcolm was met at Lincoln Central by his daughter and they both enjoyed a ride on the Great Central Railway fish-and-chip train behind the famous Tornado on the Saturday. "No worries about air-con in our Mark 1 carriage as all the windows were open."

Malcolm returned to Norwich on the 1438 from Nottingham, leaving there 4 minutes late as the conductor announced that the full class158 unit had no air-con either. He was glad that he had equipped himself with bottled water. They had to wait outside both Grantham and Peterborough so the service was cancelled at Ely, despite being only about 30 minutes late and Malcolm had to await the next train to Norwich, where he arrived almost 90 minutes later than expected.

AGM

Thank you to our members who attended the PENRUG AGM in Thetford on 30 May. The current committee members were re-elected. Contact details are below.

Following discussions with GA, we hope to have noticeboards for PENRUG at Norwich and Ely stations. If those work well, the next step will be to install boards at Wymondham and Thetford. We are grateful to the members who have volunteered to keep the noticeboards updated at all four locations. At the moment GA do not have a timeline for installation of the noticeboards.

We have taken further steps to simplify our administration by agreeing to suspend subscriptions to enable us to focus on our core activities. We will also rely on our

Facebook page, newsletter and the noticeboards as our main methods of communication without cost to the group.

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And finally . . .

30 years ago – In May 1996 Central Trains Limited, the operator of services between Norwich and Peterborough was the subject of a full page feature in the *Eastern Daily Press* promoting the long distance links available to the midlands and the north-west of England using 90mph air conditioned trains, many with at seat catering and a public phone using a BT phone card. The full timetable was also printed. An early morning Cambridge to Norwich journey had just been introduced with a return journey at 2150.

The BT phone card may have been consigned to history long ago but those same class 158 trains still provide many of our services today.

Readers were invited to join our predecessors, the Breckland Rail Users Association which was said to be poised to expand by taking in March and the surrounding area, ultimately leading to the creation of PENRUG.

50 years ago – August 1976 saw the closure of the last surviving stub of the Wymondham to Forncett railway. Designed to enable passengers from north Norfolk to travel to London without needing to go in and out of Norwich, those aspirations were never realised and the passenger service was suspended on the outbreak of war in 1939. After the end of freight traffic in the early 1950s, a two mile stretch at the Wymondham end remained in use by a scrap merchant – double track to the end.

If you have any news, information, comments or journey experiences to share (however brief), please email markcrosskill@gmail.com by 30 September for inclusion in the next newsletter.