

# PETERBOROUGH – ELY – NORWICH RAIL USERS GROUP

[www.penrug.org.uk](http://www.penrug.org.uk)

## Newsletter – January 2026

**Secretary:** John Saunders - [penrugjohn@gmail.com](mailto:penrugjohn@gmail.com)

**Membership:** Currently **FREE**. Please see our [website](#).

**NEW:** See our PENRUG page on Facebook

---

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2026. This edition includes . . .

- Performance update
- Passenger assistance benchmarking report
- Further analysis of the December '25 timetable
- Latest station footfall estimates
- Seaside connections
- Journey experiences
- Manchester Piccadilly closure
- Potential fenland freight

### PERFORMANCE

#### East Midlands Railway (EMR)

In **October**, no Liverpool-Norwich trains ran east of Peterborough on six days owing to engineering blockades.

28 services from or to Norwich were cancelled, 23 of them between Ely and Norwich. It seems that 13 of these were cancelled due to faults with the track or signalling east of Ely and maybe 10 because of staff rosters which lack resilience.

In **November**, 39 Liverpool-Norwich services were cancelled at the Norwich end of the route, 15 from or to Nottingham or beyond, 24 from or to Ely. Something like 19 seem to have been caused by staffing or rosters issues.

In **December**, 42 trains from or into Norwich on the Liverpool-Norwich route were cancelled, 14 of them from or to Nottingham, 27 from or to Ely. On Saturday 6 December 7 cancellations were attributed to signal problems. On Saturday 27 December 3 consecutive services were cancelled from Norwich to Ely.

These figures do not include services which left Norwich but did not reach their scheduled destination, nor services which arrived in Norwich but had not come from their scheduled starting point.

## Other services

There were extensive delays in the Ely area on the evening of 30 October which were attributed to trespassing, poor track conditions and signalling problems. The 1648 Stansted Airport-Norwich was among the trains affected but was seriously overcrowded with the guard on the 3-car 755 making it clear that some passengers trying to board at Ely might have to be left behind. A number of passengers had large items of luggage and may have been returning from a half term break. Arrival in Norwich was 24 minutes late.

Following replacement buses between Norwich and Ipswich at weekends in October, Norwich-Stansted Airport services were often standing room only as London bound passengers sought an alternative route. Greater Anglia (GA) ran some extra trains between Norwich and Cambridge.

With forecasters giving plenty of warning about Storm Goretti, contingency arrangements were soon in place. On 8 January, EMR said it had taken the difficult decision to withdraw some late evening and early morning services, with the advice to complete journeys by 2000. The Hope Valley Line (Manchester-Sheffield) was due to close at 1800 and remain closed until Saturday morning (10 January).

Cross Country (XC) was intending to suspend services from 1900 on Thursday 8 January. On the following day, trains ran between Stansted Airport and Peterborough only.

## Passenger assistance

For the first time, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has published a [report](#) on the delivery of assistance to passengers at stations and customer satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency. For both GA and EMR, 12% of passengers were said to have received none of the assistance booked while GA fared slightly better on customer satisfaction. This data covers 2022-2025 and relates to a much wider geographical area than our line for both operators. XC does not manage any stations and is not included in the report.

## DECEMBER 2025 TIMETABLE CHANGES

*In our last newsletter we looked at how the December timetable affected services along our line. Here, John Saunders looks at the implications for passengers travelling further afield.*

The Monday to Saturday timings that follow are typical but there are variations, especially before 0900 and after 1700.

One feature of the timetable is that some individual trains within a pattern arrive in Ely or Peterborough one minute too late for some connections to be advertised.

### **Hourly services**

March	0932
Peterborough	0949
Stamford	1006
Leicester	1049
Birmingham New Street	1138

If you catch this train and change at **Peterborough**, you should arrive in

Doncaster	1047
Grantham	1015
Huntingdon	1037
Leeds	1121
London Kings Cross	1053
Nottingham	1135
Stevenage	1116
Wakefield Westgate	1104
York (not hourly)	1150

If you change at **Leicester**, you should arrive in

Derby	1127
Sheffield	1206

If you change at **Birmingham New Street**, you should arrive in

Liverpool Lime Street	1342
Manchester Piccadilly	1329

### **Hourly services**

March	1128
Ely	1145
Cambridge	1203
Stansted Airport	1240

If you change at Ely, you should arrive in Cambridge North at 1205.

Every 2 hours

March	1119
Peterborough	1139

If you change at **Peterborough**, you should arrive in

Edinburgh	1532
London Kings Cross	1241
Newark Northgate	1217
Newcastle	1400
York	1303

Every 2 hours:

March	1011
Ely	1031
Bury St Edmunds	1100
Ipswich	1128

If you change at **Ely**, you should arrive in Norwich at 1142.

There are also three through trains to Norwich, four to Liverpool and Manchester, five to Nottingham and Sheffield. They reduce the journey time from March to Nottingham and Manchester by about 35 minutes and offer connections to Lincoln at Peterborough.

Coming back to **March**, you will have noticed that the hourly train from Edinburgh arrives in Peterborough just before 10 minutes past the hour. But most of the hourly trains from Birmingham to March are accelerated and depart from Peterborough at or just before 13 minutes past the hour. So, the two services do not connect. Even so, journeys from York to March in under 2 hours 20 minutes when you can change at Peterborough on to an Ipswich service or the 1847 to Norwich are pretty good for a non-London journey of just over 125 miles.

Highlights of travel to March include:

- Three journeys every two hours from London Kings Cross in 80 or 85 minutes
- Hourly journeys from Manchester Piccadilly in under 3 hours when you change at Nuneaton plus the through service at 1543.
- Hourly journeys from Leeds in under 100 minutes, changing at Peterborough.
- Journeys every 2 hours from Nottingham in 95 minutes, changing at Peterborough, plus the through service at 1737.

## STATION FOOTFALL - 2024/25

The Office of Rail and Road has issued station footfall figures for the 2024/25 business year. Based 'primarily' on ticket sales, these statistics are estimates of the number of people travelling to or from a station, or changing trains there.

	2023/24	2024/25	Change +/-
<b>Norwich</b>	<b>4,176,640</b>	<b>4,556,674</b>	<b>380,034</b>
Wymondham	186,470	197,704	11,234
Spooner Row	698	686	-12
Attleborough	172,376	175,046	2,670
Eccles Road	1,568	1,534	-34
Harling Road	2,457	2,501	44
<b>Thetford</b>	<b>295,514</b>	<b>305,618</b>	<b>10,104</b>
Brandon	119,300	128,812	9,512
Lakenheath	480	920	440
Shippea Hill	70	76	6
<b>Ely</b>	<b>2,052,282</b>	<b>2,299,024</b>	<b>246,742</b>
Manea	24,904	29,708	4,804
<b>March</b>	<b>340,976</b>	<b>373,732</b>	<b>32,756</b>
Whittlesea	43,364	51,194	7,830
<b>Peterborough</b>	<b>4,720,686</b>	<b>5,299,726</b>	<b>579,040</b>
Cambridge North	1,268,788	1,459,946	191,158
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>10,033,088</b>	<b>10,597,572</b>	<b>564,484</b>

Most stations show an upward trend. After a dip last year, **Wymondham** has recovered but the data pre-dates the road closures and engineering work connected with the underpass construction. **Brandon** has seen an 8% rise but the main starting point or destination is now Cambridge rather than Norwich.

**Thetford** with increased competition from buses recorded a 3.4% rise while **Norwich** and **March** both had increases of over 9%. **Ely** usage was up by 12%. Even this is eclipsed by **Whittlesea** with passenger estimates up by 18%.

**Lakenheath** is only served at weekends and while the total number of entries and exits may still be modest (920), this year's figures represent a 91.6% increase on last year with Stansted Airport replacing Cambridge as the most common starting point or destination for passengers using the station.

Many of these stations have seen phenomenal growth over the past 15-20 years. In 2007/08 Norwich was clocking up just 3.4m passengers and Cambridge 7m.

**Shippea Hill** retains its position as Britain's second least used station. With its sparse weekday service in one direction only (one early morning train to Norwich), improved patronage is unlikely to come any time soon.

## JOURNEY EXPERIENCES

*Wednesday 15 October 2025 - Thetford to Leicester*

The 0924 from Thetford gave me my first experience of travel in a purple class 158 diesel unit. The beige, grey and purple upholstery looks less dull in reality than in the photographs. It will be interesting to see how the grey carpeting copes with everyday wear. The grab-handles at the top of the seats have been painted in the same grey as the seat backs. The components at the join between the seat-back and the arm-rests have been replaced. Notices for the device chargers are in a different place and most other notices have been removed. Still no wi-fi for the business traveller though.

Several people who joined at Ely had virtual railcards on their devices, meaning that the conductor scanned their virtual ticket, then had to ask them to find the railcard, convincing me that, when my own card is due for renewal, I shall continue to ask for a “real” one. Discarded track sections reminded me of the weekend track renewals between Ely and Chettisham.

At Peterborough, a policeman and policewoman were awaiting the train, from which they removed a seemingly vulnerable passenger who needed assistance to walk upright.

The same conductor staffed both my train on to Leicester and the return journey to Ely. It was refreshing to hear relevant announcements from a human voice rather than a machine. Having needed staff assistance to get through barriers at Ely and at Peterborough recently, I was pleased that those at Leicester worked impressively quickly, less pleased that the toilets on Platforms 3 and 4 were out of action.

The footbridges, canopies and supporting pillars at Melton Mowbray and Oakham are being painted. Just as at Thetford, the parts that need possession of the tracks have been left for another day.

The 1313 from Leicester was one of the recently refurbished Turbostars. These red ones now give a choice of USB or 3-pin device charging and I noticed a nearby passenger had his device plugged in throughout his journey. The new seats look good and are far less fiercely upright than many. Their purple and dark grey upholstery is not dissimilar to the external stripes on the Azuma. The gab-rails on the seat-backs are painted white. The screens use white letters on a black background. The overall impression is of a “class” job, except that the seat bottoms could certainly do with more padding.

Ely station seems to have more platform staff these days and passengers seem happy to approach them for reassurance. The final leg of my trip saw me sitting in a single ex-first class seat on the “Salisbury” class 158. A man sat on his “pusher” in the doorway playing with his device. All four of the trains I used ran within about five minutes of time. As I gingerly descended the footbridge steps at Thetford, the rail head treatment train came powering through the station.

*John Saunders*

---

*Tuesday 11 November 2025 – Cambridge to York*

It's still dark as I arrive on Platform 4 at Cambridge on the first leg of a business trip to York. I'm relieved that the 0657 Cross Country service to Birmingham New Street arrives on time. It's a 3-car class 170, yet to be refurbished. The train is clean and litter free but with its tired furniture and worn and stained carpets, it's reassuring that the refurbishment programme for these trains is underway.

There is wi-fi but no charge points. The temperature is comfortable.

There are only three other passengers in my coach. The conductor makes the first of numerous announcements but unfortunately parts of them are muffled or inaudible. One of my fellow passengers starts to panic as the train pulls out of Cambridge because he has seen the screen at the end of the coach which says 'this train is for Stansted Airport'. I tell him it's a mistake and he seems reassured.

At Ely, 18 passengers are waiting to board but many more are on Platform 2 bound for Cambridge or London.

As we approach March, I notice the fenced-off Station Hotel for a brief moment before 26 people board the train.

Before Whittlesea, the conductor makes an announcement which I half hear/half guess is a warning about the short platform and the need to travel in the front two coaches. There are 25 people joining us at Whittlesea, many of whom appear to be students. The departure screen on the platform is displaying the wrong information. It says our train is the 0818 to Liverpool Lime Street whereas it is the 0741 to Birmingham New Street. Meanwhile, the screen inside the train still states the destination is Stansted Airport.

Arrival at Peterborough is five minutes late which only gives me five minutes to change platforms before my train to York leaves. I make it but with little time to spare. This LNER service is lightly loaded and arrives in York on time but I narrowly avoid a cyclist who speeds past me from behind as I walk down the platform, unchallenged by any staff.

All in all, a relatively smooth journey despite erroneous information on screen.

*Mark Crosskill*

**If you have any news, information, comments or journey experiences to share (however brief), please email [markcrosskill@gmail.com](mailto:markcrosskill@gmail.com) by 31 March for inclusion in the next newsletter.**

## OH, I DO LIKE TO BE BY THE SEA

*It has been a quarter of a century since some Liverpool-Norwich trains ran through to Yarmouth on summer Saturdays. It has been even longer since British Rail extended some Cambridge-Norwich workings to the resort. The need for passengers bound for the coast to change at Norwich is well-established but with fierce competition from buses, how attractive is a trip to the coast by train for passengers on our route? John Saunders has been finding out.*

### **The good.**

Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Peterborough, Ely and Thetford have almost hourly good connections to Great Yarmouth seven days a week.

### **The bad.**

Attleborough has no connection to Great Yarmouth from 0852 to 1621 on Mondays to Saturdays and none on Sundays. Wymondham is similar, Brandon is worse.

Great Yarmouth has no good connection to Wymondham, Attleborough or Brandon from 0735 to 1747 on Mondays to Saturdays, none on Sundays.

### **The ugly.**

Most trains from Great Yarmouth run into Norwich just as the Liverpool route express is leaving or preparing to leave. The only connections are at 0612, 0707 and 1917 on Mondays to Saturdays.

### **The alternatives.**

Lowestoft has almost hourly good connections into the Liverpool route expresses on Mondays to Saturdays.

Cromer and Sheringham have decent connections from and into the Liverpool route expresses.

Brandon, Attleborough and Wymondham have good connections to Lowestoft on Mondays to Saturdays but only the 1648 back to Wymondham and Attleborough.

On Sundays the 0920 from Nottingham provides an excellent connection to Lowestoft from Peterborough, March, Ely, Brandon, Thetford, Attleborough and Wymondham. There is no similar connection home to Wymondham, Attleborough, Brandon or March.

The 0950 bus from Attleborough Queens Square gets you to Great Yarmouth at or before 1120 seven days a week with a return journey at 1530 (and also at 1645 on Mondays to Saturdays), changing at Norwich bus station.

Wymondham's frequent Green Line buses stop outside Norwich railway station, providing connections into and out of the hourly coastal trains on Mondays to Saturdays.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ‘Anglia Railway’

Early in December, ‘Anglia Railway’ was formally established, bringing together Greater Anglia, c2c and Network Rail Anglia Route under MD Jamie Burles. All three organisations will be working more closely before a unified executive team is created in the spring. For the moment, the message is ‘business as usual’ with no changes to services and ticketing.

EMR and XC are expected to be in public ownership by the end of 2027.

### Bridge strikes

[BBC News](#) reported ‘Britain’s most bashed bridges’ which include:

- Stuntney Road, Ely - 15 strikes
- Stonea Road, Stonea - 15 strikes
- Abbey Farm, Thetford - 11 strikes

Three bridge bashes were occurred in the space of a week in October at Ely as reported by [Cambridgeshire Live](#)

### Cambridge

[Real time bus information](#) is now displayed on a screen above the ticket barriers at Cambridge station. As at Norwich, it is positioned to be seen by passengers arriving by rail at the station.

Between 27 December and 4 January, buses replaced trains between Cambridge North and Audley End to enable Alstom to install new equipment in the second phase of the re-signalling project in the Cambridge area which will also pave the way for the delayed opening of Cambridge South station. Trains continued to run between Norwich and Cambridge North and between Birmingham New Street and Ely.

The dates and details for Phase 3 of the project have yet to be confirmed but according to the [Network Rail](#) website, it *might* include work between Brandon and Eccles Road, and the upgrading of a number of level crossings including Croxton near Thetford where there has been a long running speed restriction.

Following visits to Norwich and Lowestoft in 2025, the Railways 200 ‘inspiration’ exhibition train is set to visit Cambridge on 31 January and 1 February 2026. Ticket booking can be accessed through the [Greater Anglia network website](#).

### Cambridge South

It was announced early in November that the opening of Cambridge South station, pencilled in for early 2026, had been postponed to June due to a contractor entering administration. [BBC News](#) was among the media outlets reporting the story. Early in January, GA mentioned the station would open in ‘summer 2026’.

Birmingham-Stansted trains are due to call when the station does eventually open. Off-peak Norwich-Stansted trains will also serve the station.

## **Ely North Junction**

Early in December, [BBC News](#) reported that Charlotte Cane, MP for Ely and East Cambridgeshire was 'bemused' by the lack of progress on the upgrade for the junction. Ms Cane secured a debate in the House of Commons. The *Cambridge Independent* carried an item a few days later highlighting that the outline business case was submitted back in March 2022 and that increased capacity would eliminate 98,000 lorry movements a year. The *Eastern Daily Press* headlined the need to close or upgrade 44 level crossings as part of any upgrade and reported that Local Transport Minister Lilian Greenwood indicated the business case was 'strong' but the government could not yet fund it.

## **Golden Spanner Awards**

Greater Anglia's 4-car bi-mode trains won the Golden Spanner for the most reliable 'second generation new diesel unit' for the fourth year running. The 4-car trains are normally to be found on Norwich-Stansted services.

## **Manchester Piccadilly**

Due to a £7.9m track and signalling renewal project, there will be no access to Manchester Piccadilly station from the south and east between Saturday 14 February and Sunday 22 February. Platforms 1-12 will be closed. Eleven sets of points and 9,000 metres of cabling are being replaced and concrete sleepers installed.

Replacement buses will operate between Stockport and Manchester Piccadilly while journey planners also show some journeys involving changes at Peterborough and York (for Manchester Victoria) or buses to Piccadilly from Chesterfield.

The advice is to check before your journey and travel light. More information can be found on the [Network Rail website](#).

## **Manea**

[BBC News](#) reported the dismantling of the semaphore signals at Manea on 1 November.

Looking ahead, plans by Anglian Water and Cambridge Water for a new reservoir in the Cambridgeshire Fens reached the latest pre-application consultation stage in the autumn. If approved, the reservoir would be constructed between March and Chatteris, not far from Manea.

The [main reservoir site proposals brochure](#) mentions that the project team is looking at delivering some of its longer distance materials by rail which could save 350-400 HGV movements per day. The team is exploring with Network Rail two options for a railhead for receiving construction materials for onward transmission to the site via the A141 or a new road constructed for the purpose.

Subject to approval, the reservoir would not be operational before 2036.

### **Thetford**

GA report that adopters are installing ‘Trains, Cranes; No Automobiles’ Interpretation Panels/Posters, along with insect identification charts at Thetford and Lakenheath stations emphasising the sustainable travel link with RSPB Lakenheath Fen.

### **Wymondham**

The lack of step-free access to Platform 2 at Wymondham has again been raised in Parliament as reported in the [Norwich Evening News](#). Southbound passengers can only access the platform via the footbridge.

In the second reading of the Railways Bill on 9 December, Ben Goldsborough MP said: *‘I would not be doing my job properly as the MP for South Norfolk if I did not talk about Wymondham station and its accessibility. Colleagues may know that Wymondham’s station code is WMD. In South Norfolk, that stands not for “weapons of mass destruction”, but for “we must deliver”. In this case, we must deliver step-free access to platform 2. Wymondham has waited 180 years—since the station first opened—for step-free access to the southbound platform. That means that disabled people, those pushing buggies, or elderly passengers carrying heavy luggage simply cannot catch the southbound train. Instead, you must travel all the way north to Norwich, wait, turn around and come back again’.*

As this newsletter was being finalised, the Department for Transport had confirmed that as part of the [Access for All](#) programme, plans to improve accessibility at Wymondham station had been approved for progression to the next stage of development. There are more steps in the process before final plans and timelines can be announced.

### **PENRUG OFFICERS**

**Secretary: John Saunders**  
[penrugjohn@gmail.com](mailto:penrugjohn@gmail.com)

**Membership Secretary/Treasurer/Website Editor: David Goldsmith**  
[penrugdavid@yahoo.com](mailto:penrugdavid@yahoo.com)

**Chair/Newsletter Editor: Mark Crosskill**  
[markcrosskill@gmail.com](mailto:markcrosskill@gmail.com)

### **JOIN US!**

**If you are not already a member of PENRUG or if you know someone who might like to join, membership is currently FREE to receive quarterly newsletters and other updates. You can also put forward your comments and share your journey experiences. See our [website](#).**

