



The Sheringham Rail Link

A project presented by the Holt, Melton Constable and Fakenham Railway Co Ltd.
Promoters of the Norfolk Orbital Railway

Press Release December 2007

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THE SHERINGHAM LINK – MAJOR PROGRESS. NETWORK RAIL AGREES

The two remaining sections of the M&GN RAILWAY to be reconnected after 36 years

Background

The Holt, Melton Constable and Fakenham Railway Ltd. (HMC&FR) is the organisation which has been pursuing the Norfolk Orbital Railway project. This aims long term to link existing Network Rail lines, the North Norfolk Railway (NNR) and the Mid Norfolk Railway (MNR) to provide a new public transport facility for the county.

The first stage is the linking of the highly successful Norwich – Sheringham Bittern Line and NNR at Sheringham. By agreement with NNR, the HMC&FR has been progressing this as a priority through extensive negotiations with Network Rail and other relevant bodies.

The HMC&FR directors are David Rees, Trevor Bailey and David Bill who were founders of what became NNR and a central part of a small group that saved the railway and some of its now famous locomotives and rolling stock in the 1960's during the overwhelming Beeching rail closure of the time. The fourth member of the team, and financial expert, is local resident Derek Haynes. Both Trevor Bailey and David Bill grew up in Sheringham and have travelled on the railway since early childhood.

The Orbital Railway Project has a large number of paid up supporters several of whom, such as Sheringham resident Peter Baldwin, are highly active in representing the project.

Progress

Network Rail's view has always been crucial to progress with the Sheringham Rail link. After a lot of careful discussion with HMC&FR, Network Rail has now decided that it will be happy to see the construction of an initial "occasional use" link between the Bittern Line and NNR; a distance of only a few yards across the former level crossing over Station Road. At first this will allow limited use for special excursion trains and rolling stock movements.

David Rees said that although the "Occasional use" link does not fulfil the whole of HMC&FR's hopes for Sheringham it is a vital step forward and it is very encouraging that Network Rail are so supportive of allowing a physical connection between the two railways. As will be well known, we have drawn up plans in collaboration with NNR for a joint station for both the Bittern Line and NNR, using the original station now owned by NNR, and for an integrated transport interchange allowing the easiest possible links between the two rail services, buses, cars, bicycles and pedestrians. This is based upon very successful models already operating elsewhere and suggested by Network Rail personnel as a future-proof solution to the unsatisfactory existing Network Rail station. This concept is strongly supported by the Bittern Line Partnership and the Norfolk Rail Policy Group, the key body backing railway development in the county which is co-ordinated by the County Council.

In its November briefing note to stakeholders (HMC&FR, NNR, One Railway and the Bittern Line Partnership) Network Rail supports the "occasional use" link provided it does not affect

Network Rail's core activities. It has not, however, ruled out the longer-term development of the link to create a full joint station.

"To have got to this stage is a very significant achievement" said David Rees. "In 1971 we failed in our desperate wish to prevent the link being removed. Many people involved then just did not think it was important. Now we can begin to overcome the practical limitations that were created by that short-sighted action"

Trevor Bailey adds "NNR, given its other recent commitments, has not felt that it could take an active role or find resources to help build the link. Hence the need for us to take it forward. Now, inspired by this real advance and completion of some of its other projects, NNR feels that it can get down to the job and find money towards it."

"It will now be NNR's responsibility to see the legal and engineering work through in line with Network Rail, the Department of Transport, the Railway Inspectorate and the County Council's requirements. We are aware, for example, that the County Council is keen to see the link project co-ordinated with its forthcoming Market Town study for Sheringham. Although the construction of the link is a fairly minor engineering task in itself, there is important background work to do."

David Bill pointed out that an initial phase of the work had already been carried out and that, without it, further progress would have been unrealistic. This was the purchase of Ottendorf Green, the piece of former railway land between NNR and Station Road over which NNR has already been able to extend its track.

"I am very glad that we were able to fund the purchase of this initial land for NNR at a time when their finances were stretched by other commitments", he said. "The transfer of land was greatly helped by the positive attitude of the previous owners, North Norfolk District Council. The Council has supported the major professional studies that we have commissioned into the engineering and traffic potential of the Orbital Railway and has ensured that the land required for the rail link is protected in its draft Local Development Framework."

Derek Haynes, echoed by all of his colleagues, emphasised a further point: "It is crucial to us that this link becomes part of an important public transport improvement for North Norfolk and is not seen as solely benefiting the North Norfolk Railway's heritage activities, valuable as those are. For example, we greatly hope that the limited number of trains that pass over the initial "occasional use" connection will not only bring traffic to NNR, but will also provide thoroughly useful services from North Norfolk to varied destinations for the benefit of local people".

Anyone interested in supporting the Norfolk Orbital Railway Project should contact the HMC&FR. Ltd. at The Railway Institute, Melton Constable, NR24 2DA