

NEW LIFE FOR SMALL RAILWAY STATIONS: GATEWAYS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Chris Wood
Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership
Clive Morris
National Express East Anglia

1. INTRODUCTION

The smaller, lightly used stations on the railway network are often distant from homes or businesses, limiting their potential for generating local traffic. They tend to have only limited services and are targets for closure or mothballing.

However, the fact that few people live or work nearby means that some stations have real potential as gateways to the countryside. Depending on local networks of Public Rights of Way and land access, people can take the train out from towns and cities and be dropped directly in their recreational environment, avoiding the access barriers of suburbs, major roads and industrial areas. Smaller railway stations can therefore help promote the environmental, health and social inclusion agendas.

The Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership, the RSPB, National Express East Anglia (formerly 'one' Railway) and the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership have worked together to generate new patronage at small stations in Norfolk and Suffolk. Lakenheath, on the Norwich-Ely-Cambridge line, and Buckenham, on the Norwich-Great Yarmouth/Lowestoft 'Wherry Lines', were low usage stations, with a service consisting of one train in each direction a day on weekdays, and an uncertain future. They also have RSPB reserves on their doorsteps and good local walking and cycling links.

In order to turn Lakenheath and Buckenham into 'rail gateways to the countryside', a radical solution was found. With the new timetable in May 2007, the weekday, one-a-day service ceased and was replaced with a usable and marketable number of trains each Sunday. The new service has been promoted with special leaflets, on-train advertising and station rebranding.

Buckenham is promoted along with other smaller stations along the Yare valley, particularly the remote Berney Arms, which is already a rail gateway to the countryside, sitting in the midst of an RSPB reserve and good walking opportunities, but with no road connection!

Significant increased patronage has been observed, particularly at Lakenheath, which demonstrates the potential for countryside access and rural tourism as a market for the railways. It also shows the value of the railways to sustainable tourism.

This paper describes how the initiative came into being, reports its impact on patronage, and looks at future potential for 'rail gateways to the countryside'.

1.1 The Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership

Widen the Choice brings together The National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Natural England. It covers the East of England region, as defined by the Government (*i.e.* the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire). Its remit is to find ways of making it easier for people to reach the countryside and rural wildlife and heritage attractions by means other than the car. The expected benefit of this work is reduced environmental impacts from car use in the countryside, improved access to the countryside by more sustainable means of transport, and greater, sustainable use of the countryside by all sections of society.

The National Trust and the RSPB are the largest environmental charities in the United Kingdom. They both want people to visit the countryside, but do not want to increase the environmental and social impacts of the travel generated. In particular, The National Trust has an aspirational, national target for reducing the proportion of its visitors arriving by car from well over 90% in 1995, to 60% in 2020.

Natural England brings together the rural access aims of The Countryside Agency, the access to nature and nature protection aims of English Nature and the stewardship remit of the Rural Development Service. Natural England's *Strategic Direction 2006 – 2009* aims, amongst other things, to:

- secure improvement in the condition of the natural environment and public access to it;
- increase the number, diversity and frequency of people enjoying the natural environment;
- reduce the transport impact of nature-based tourism; and
- contribute to the major national and international efforts required to address climate change.

The Widen the Choice partnership is an independent, catalytic animator in the rural recreational travel sphere, able to make the links between organisations and sectors with different agendas, thereby creating innovative approaches and projects. More on the partnership's work is to be found in Wood (2005; 2007).

1.2 National Express East Anglia

National Express is an international transport provider, with divisions in the UK, Spain and North America. Only within the UK does it operate train services and currently it operates the National Express East Anglia, National Express East Coast and C2C franchised train companies. National Express East Anglia is the principal train service provider for the Eastern Region, operating trains that serve commuter, business and leisure markets. Whilst 80% of the business is about transporting customers to and from London Liverpool Street, the more rural business has an important role to play in the region.

Building on an approach taken by Anglia Railways, the company that operated rural train services during the first round of rail franchising, well-established links with local stakeholders have made this part of the business nationally renowned for working with the community to improve rail services in East Anglia. This approach has seen significant rail passenger flows develop around the major business centres of Ipswich, Norwich and Cambridge, and to and from the coastal resorts of Cromer, Sheringham, Lowestoft and Felixstowe during the summer months. The rural business of National Express East Anglia is also a key player in the success of the Bittern, Wherry and East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnerships.

It is with this in mind that National Express was pleased to work with Widen the Choice on this small but exciting project.

2. BACKGROUND

Access to natural and semi-natural open space is important for people's health in terms of exercise and psychological well-being (Bird, 2004; Maas *et al*, 2006; NICE, 2008; Pretty *et al*, 2005). Countryside recreation also allows people to develop a greater understanding of the natural world, nature conservation, agriculture and rural life and heritage. There is also an economic benefit for rural areas, especially from visitors who arrive by public transport, pedal cycle or foot, as more money is spent in the *local* economy¹.

There is a downside to countryside access in the form of excessive traffic. Congestion, dangerous roads, parking pressure and pollution are not only urban problems, they are ever more serious in the countryside too. The impact is particularly noticeable in summer months in the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), but 'ordinary' countryside around towns and cities suffers too, making tranquil areas more remote and sought-after.

At the same time, many people are unable to experience the recreational benefits of visiting the countryside. A quarter of households nationwide has no access to a car, rising to nearly half in inner urban areas², not forgetting a particularly disenfranchised minority in rural areas themselves. Many who do have access to a car are put off by everybody else's!

Few people in general perceive buses and trains to be an option for getting out into the countryside, and walking and cycling have become much less attractive as motor traffic has become faster and heavier, and as rural roads have been upgraded to suit. Rural public transport has been starved of patronage as people who live and work in the countryside have been replaced by urban commuters and retirees. Buses have gone the way of other village services, shops and pubs, making the lives of those without cars in rural areas all the harder and forcing families who can ill afford it to have them, reinforcing the trend (as they cannot then afford other options).

However, rail has real potential for green tourism in those areas of the countryside it serves, as is recognised elsewhere in Europe. Furthermore,

local rail services can help satisfy a growing need for a reduction in travel speed and distance, essential to genuine eco-tourism, and support domestic holidaymaking as an alternative to international, airborne tourism (Baumgartner, *et al*, 2006; National Trust, 2005; Salveson, 1993).

From the perspective of rail operators, recreational access to the countryside makes use of empty capacity on services out of urban centres, making them more sustainable financially as well as environmentally.

The East of England's railway network is comparatively dense and there is a range of stations in good locations for countryside access. These include stations whose locations allow easy access onto footpaths or quiet lanes, where there is a significant wildlife or recreational attraction within easy reach on foot, or where good quality bus links allow easy access to countryside further afield. Table 1 gives a number of examples from the National Express East Anglia network, shown in Figures 1 and 2. There is even one station, Berney Arms, serving a part of the Norfolk Broads to which the public cannot gain access by car.

A number of the stations in Table 1 are assured a future through having a good local resident population. They tend to be located on the edge of that population and so provide easy countryside access too. Good examples of this category include Manningtree, Wrabness, West Runton, Rye House and Cheshunt. Others have convenient foot links to the edge of their settlements, such as Oulton Broad South and Needham Market, or have good bus connections nearby, as in Chelmsford, Woodbridge and Sudbury.

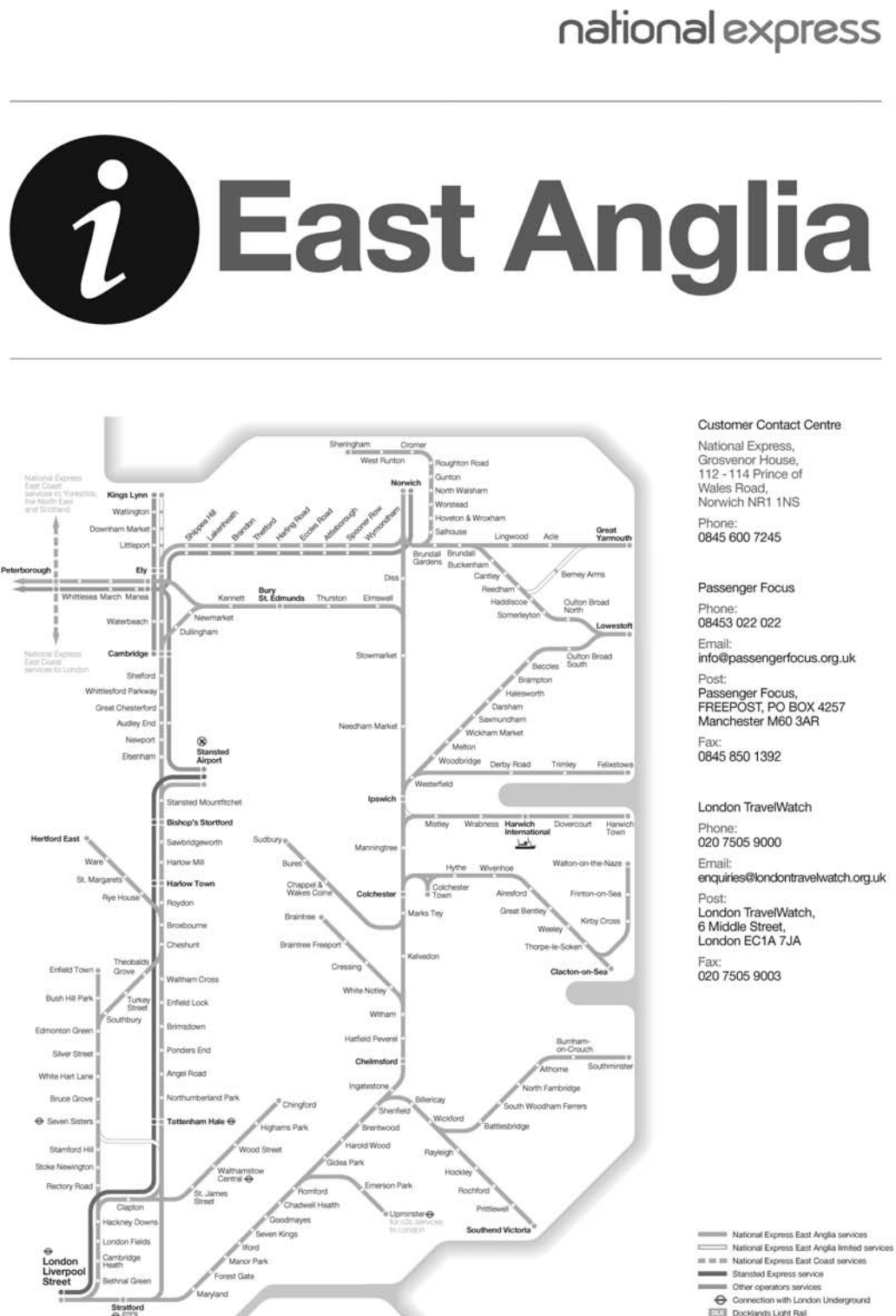
Some, however, are good for access to the countryside precisely because few people live near them. Buckenham, Harling Road and Lakenheath fall into this category. Because of this small local market, such stations as these have traditionally had a very poor service, generally a train a day in each direction, Monday to Friday. On the basis of local ridership, even this, 'statutory' service is poorly justified. As a result, these low-usage stations are vulnerable to permanent closure or at least mothballing. The 'statutory' service level is at the same time not useful to countryside visitors. However, if a reasonable service can be provided and promoted, even just at weekends, it may be possible to give these stations new life as 'gateways to the countryside'.

Access to the countryside was seen as a useful adjunct to the role of stations as gateways to *market towns* in the former Countryside Agency's Gateway Stations pilot project, particularly Tring, Hertfordshire, and Sandown, Isle of Wight (Nichols, 2005). The encouragement of leisure use is an important element of the work of Community Rail Partnerships, including that for the Wherry Lines, which covers Buckenham, Cantley and Berney Arms. The national Association of Community Rail Partnerships also devoted a recent conference (November 2007) to the topic of 'Tourism and Rural Railways'.

Table 1. Examples of stations on the National Express East Anglia network that can act as gateways to the countryside

Station	County	Line	Access
Berney Arms	Norfolk	Norwich-Great Yarmouth (Wherry Lines)	Footpaths, English Heritage mill & RSPB Berney Marshes & Breydon Water.
Buckenham	Norfolk	Norwich-Lowestoft/ Great Yarmouth (Wherry Lines)	RSPB Buckenham Marshes/ Strumpshaw Fen, footpaths, Yare Valley Cycle Route.
Bures	Suffolk/ Essex	Mark's Tey-Sudbury (Gainsborough Line)	Short walk to long-distance paths; published 'Car(e)-Free' Itinerary.
Cantley	Norfolk	Norwich-Lowestoft/ Great Yarmouth (Wherry Lines)	Riverside footpaths, RSPB Cantley Marshes, quiet lanes. Yare Valley Cycle Route.
Chelmsford	Essex	London Liverpool St.-Ipswich/Norwich	Bus access to wider countryside.
Cheshunt	Herts.	London Liverpool St.-Cambridge	Foot and cycle access to Lea Valley Park.
Darsham	Suffolk	Ipswich-Lowestoft (East Suffolk Lines)	CoastLink ³ to Walberswick NNR ⁴ , Dunwich Forest/ Heath & RSPB Minsmere; published walks.
Harling Road	Norfolk	Norwich-Ely	Start of Hereward Way long-distance path.
Lakenheath	Suffolk	Norwich-Ely	Foot access to RSPB Lakenheath Fen; Hereward Way long-distance path.
Manningtree	Essex/ Suffolk	London Liverpool St.-Ipswich/Norwich	Foot access into Dedham Vale AONB.
Needham Market	Suffolk	Ipswich-Bury	Foot access to Local Nature Reserve.
Oulton Broad South	Suffolk	Ipswich-Lowestoft (East Suffolk Lines)	Short walk to wildlife centre; published walks.
Rye House	Herts.	London Liverpool St.-Hertford East	Short walk to RSPB Rye Meads; Lea Valley Park.
Sheringham	Norfolk	Norwich-Sheringham (Bittern Line)	Short walk to coast; CoastHopper bus along the Norfolk Coast AONB.
Sudbury	Suffolk	Mark's Tey-Sudbury (Gainsbor'gh Line)	Bus access to the wider countryside.
West Runton	Norfolk	Norwich-Sheringham (Bittern Line)	Foot access into National Trust woods and heathland.
Woodbridge & Melton	Suffolk	Ipswich-Lowestoft (East Suffolk Lines)	Published walks; bus access to wider countryside.
Wrabness	Essex	Manningtree-Harwich (Mayflower Line)	Foot access to RSPB Stour Estuary Reserves and Essex Way long-distance path.

Figure 1. The National Express East Anglia Railway Network



nxea.customerrelations@nationalexpress.com

Partnership can lead to good publicity, attracting people to come by train, so improving the destination's environmental credentials, and exposing it to new geographical markets – if only because on-train publicity moves with the rolling stock, which may well work lines other than that which serves the destination directly. Furthermore, encouraging and developing means of access and audiences that are not dependent upon the car gives the destination greater security in the face of rising fuel prices, post-peak oil supplies and potential future carbon rationing or other incentives to seek alternatives to the car.

3. MATCHING UP SERVICE WITH LOCATION: THE SCHEME FOR LAKENHEATH AND BUCKENHAM

Norfolk and Suffolk have a varied landscape, but are particularly well endowed with wetlands. Whilst marine encroachment is eroding fresh-water coastal habitats, these are being replaced inland, particularly by the various fen recreation projects, such as at RSPB Lakenheath Fen, in north-west Suffolk, on the border between Breckland and the Fens.

This, 300-hectare, growing reserve is mid-way in its development as a major resource. Designed to cater for 50,000 visitors *per annum* by 2010, the reserve and interpretation centre are raising the profile of the area as a heritage destination.

The specific site was chosen, in part, for its proximity to a railway station, Lakenheath. Stepping off Lakenheath station, there is only a short walk to the main reserve entrance. The Hereward Way long-distance footpath runs past and a short distance away is High Fen Farm, which is managed in traditional ways under a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs / Natural England Stewardship scheme, and which offers conservation walks.

The RSPB also manages extensive grazing marshes in Norfolk's Yare valley, a part of the Broads that is relatively unexploited for tourists. These reserves include the Mid-Yare National Nature Reserve, between Brundall and Cantley, east of Norwich, and Berney Marshes at the head of Breydon Water, west of Great Yarmouth. One of the Norwich to Great Yarmouth railway lines runs alongside the Mid-Yare reserves (Brundall, Buckenham and Cantley stations) and crosses Berney Marshes, with a small station, Berney Arms, forming the only public, motorised land-transport link to the reserve, the celebrated Berney Arms pub and English Heritage's windmill.

At Buckenham, quiet lanes, excellent for cycling and walking, lie outside the platform gates. There is a riverside footpath and the Yare Valley Cycle Route runs past. RSPB Buckenham Marshes nature reserve is on the doorstep, with RSPB Strumpshaw Fen and the Strumpshaw Steam Museum a pleasant mile's walk or cycle ride away. Strumpshaw Fen, which normally charges for admission, waives this on presentation of a valid train ticket.

Lacking local ridership, the service at both Buckenham and Lakenheath consisted of one train a day, Monday to Friday, and usage was declining.

According to the Office of the Rail Regulator, the total of entries and exits at Buckenham declined from 39 to just 29 between 2004/5 and 2005/6. Berney Arms, however, is unique, which itself is a draw, and patronage is still reasonable.

The Widen the Choice Partnership identified the potential of rail access to RSPB Buckenham Marshes and Lakenheath Fen in its green access audits for the reserves (see Wood, 2007). It began talking to the Train Operating Company, then Anglia Railways, and became involved with the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership. Discussions continued on the transfer of the franchise to 'one' Railway in April 2004, now National Express East Anglia. A Sunday service was clearly the easiest to provide, as it would impinge least on the rest of the timetable, but the stumbling block was being able to justify *additional* calls over and above the weekday, 'statutory' service.

Undeterred, Widen the Choice and the RSPB hosted a special visit to Lakenheath Fen in September 2005, attended by representatives of 'one' Railway, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire County Councils and the Norwich-Peterborough Line Users' Group.

The key to achieving a workable scheme was an idea, from the then Cambridgeshire County Council Rail Policy Officer, Alan Browning⁵, following this visit. This was to abolish the 'statutory', one-a-day service, in favour of a more frequent service on a Sunday, which would be relatively easy to accommodate within the train operations diagram.

Widen the Choice produced a business case for a change in the calling pattern at Lakenheath, followed by one for a similar change at Buckenham. Support was forthcoming from the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership and the Norwich-Peterborough Line Users' Group.

As a result of this partnership approach, a proposal was arrived at to make best use of resources at two stations that could have been mothballed. National Express obtained a derogation from the Department for Transport (see section 4, below), inserted request stops in its timetable, and has upgraded station information and signs.

At Buckenham, the 'statutory' service was exchanged for a Sunday request service of four trains (plus one on Saturdays) in each direction with the May 2007 timetable (although the afternoon services are restricted in the winter half of the year due to lighting issues, a topic of continuing discussion). At Lakenheath, the new service is three request trains a day, plus one on Saturdays. In both cases, timings were arrived at in consultation with RSPB reserve staff, in order to allow sensible morning, afternoon or whole-day visits.

4. THE PROCESS OF GAINING SCHEME APPROVAL

Initially, local stakeholders were approached to discuss the logic and overall benefits of the project. A common sense approach meant that local approval was easily achieved. However, before any changes could be made to the timetable, the Department for Transport (DfT) had to grant a temporary derogation to the train operator's Service Level Commitment (SLC), which is the formal agreement on service provision.

The DfT needed to be convinced that there would not be any local resistance to the removal of weekday train services at the stations concerned, (Lakenheath, Shippea Hill and Buckenham), trading these for an enhanced service at Lakenheath, Buckenham and Berney Arms at weekends. As part of the process, there was an analysis of usage, which supported the argument.

In addition to the changes to the calling pattern at these stations, two additional but unrelated offers were made by National Express East Anglia. Firstly, the train service at Brandon would be increased from two-hourly to hourly, based on good growth that had been seen at this station since the service was improved to two-hourly in December 2004. Secondly, an hourly service would be operated on the Norwich-Sheringham, Bittern Line on summer Sundays, to further improve rail journey opportunities to the key destinations of Wroxham (for the Broads), Cromer, Sheringham and the North Norfolk Railway.

The DfT accepted these changes in the spirit they were offered. Following further analysis of the success of the initiative and no adverse customer reaction to the removal of the weekday trains, this was made a permanent derogation to the SLC in May 2008.

5. PROMOTION AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

The change in service patterns is only part of the project, as the new opportunities available have to be promoted to the majority of people who do not study new timetables very closely. The RSPB and the Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership actively promote the Sunday and Public Holiday train service in promotional material, both in print and on the RSPB web-site, and staff at RSPB Lakenheath Fen, in particular, have been enthusiastic in word-of-mouth promotion. Press releases have been issued, although uptake has been limited, and some local magazine articles have been published.

At Buckenham, the station name signs were replaced with new ones, showing the logos of the RSPB and the Wherry Lines CRP, with funding from Norfolk County Council. At Lakenheath, the RSPB logo was added to the signs, with the costs shared between the Train Operating Company and the RSPB.

Widen the Choice produced two special leaflets (Figures 3 and 4). One promotes RSPB Lakenheath Fen, High Fen Farm and the Hereward Way, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Forest Heath District Council. The other, entitled 'Explore the Yare Valley', promotes the use of Buckenham

and three other small stations on the Norwich-Yarmouth line as a string of pearls for exploring the Yare valley on Sundays, with money from the Broads Authority Sustainable Development Fund⁶. The other stations are Cantley and Reedham, which have pubs, footpaths, cycle routes and a significant resident population, and Berney Arms, which also has a better service on Sundays than during the week.

The leaflets have been available at railway stations, Tourism Information Centres, Broads Authority Information Centres, RSPB reserves, libraries, local authorities and other outlets since late June 2007. A pdf version can be downloaded from the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership web-site.

Matching A3 posters (Figures 5 and 6) were produced for display on trains as 'default posters', *i.e.* there instead of blank space in panels used for time-limited promotions, which actually means they are visible most of the time. There was a short hiatus in promotion in February 2008, when 'one' was rebranded to National Express East Anglia, but the National Express marketing department agreed to fund a reprint of the leaflets, and the posters were also revised accordingly, so that coverage was reinstated by May.

In addition, other things have been done to make access by train more attractive. The Train Operating Company arranged for selected repainting to be done at Lakenheath and Buckenham, and provided small planters at the former, which were planted in the first season with attractive, native plants and maintained by RSPB staff. Forest Heath District Council has also installed an interpretation panel at the exit from Lakenheath station, showing the reserve and associated wildlife.

Over the time this project has been running, the condition of both Lakenheath and Buckenham stations has improved, as gauged by the internal auditing carried out quarterly by National Express. The Service Quality Survey (SQS) considers the state of platforms, approaches, shelters and information, to give a rounded picture of the quality of stations. Results for Lakenheath and Buckenham are shown in Figure 7, below.

For its part, the RSPB has provided a new footpath at Lakenheath, from the beginning of RSPB frontage, north of the level crossing, to the interpretation centre, so that visitors do not need to walk along the road and then along the main entrance drive.

Figure 3. Leaflet for Lakenheath Fen

Information and Other Attractions



RSPB Lakenheath Fen: 01842 863 400, www.rspb.org.uk; e-mail: lakenheath@rspb.org.uk.

National Rail Enquiries: 08457 48 49 50, www.nationalrail.co.uk.

National Express: 0845 600 7245, nationalexpress.co.uk.

Brecks Bus - for pre-booked travel in much of Breckland: 01842 816 170.

Traveline - for buses: 0871 200 22 33, www.traveline.org.uk.

Forest Heath District Council - Tourist Information (local attractions, events, food and accommodation): 01638 867 200, www.forest-heath.gov.uk/leisure/tourism.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust Weeting Heath Nature Reserve: 01842 827 615, www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Conservation Walks on High Fen Farm - take care on the road, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/publicaccess/ (look under Suffolk).

The Brecks Partnerships - all you need to know about Breckland: www.brecks.org.

Hereward Way - long-distance footpath from Harling Road station, through Thetford Forest and Brandon, to Ely and across the Fens: Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 230, 229, 228 & 227.

Walsingham Way - pilgrim walk from Ely to Walsingham: www.johnmerrillwalkguides.com.

Picture Credits
Reedbank - rspb-images.com / Chris Gomersell
Reeds - Chris Wood
Bearded Tit - rspb-images.com / Mike Richards
Bird's eye view - RSPB / Mike Page
Lapwing - rspb-images.com / A. Hey
Marsh Harrier - rspb-images.com / Chris Gomersell

Train Times (Saturdays & Sundays)

	Sat.	Sun.
Norwich	09:40	09:15 11:15 15:15
Wymondham	09:52	09:27 11:27 15:27
Attleborough	09:59	09:34 11:34 15:34
Thetford	10:12	09:47 11:47 15:47
Brandon	10:20	09:55 11:55 15:55
Lakenheath	10x25	10x00 12x00 16x00
Ely (arrive)	10:38	10:20 12:18 16:14
Cambridge (arr)	10:55	10:38 12:34 16:31

	Sat.	Sun.
Cambridge	15:12	10:44 12:46 15:38
Ely	15:27	11:01 13:01 15:53
Lakenheath	15x40	11x15 13x14 16x06
Brandon	15:46	11:20 13:20 16:12
Thetford	15:54	11:29 13:28 16:20
Attleborough	16:08	11:43 13:42 16:34
Wymondham	16:15	11:50 13:49 16:41
Norwich (arrive)	16:30	12:09 14:09 16:55

X: Trains call at Lakenheath by request - tell the conductor you want to get off and give a clear signal to an approaching train to get on.
Bank Holidays: check with National Express that it's a Sunday service.
NB, in the event of engineering works, replacement buses do not call at Lakenheath.
Other days: Monday-Friday the nearest station is Brandon; book the Brecks Bus to reach Lakenheath Fen; call 01842 816 170 to book, by noon the day before travel.
This is not a complete timetable - other trains do not stop at Lakenheath, but can form part of your day out if you walk to Brandon; see the full timetable. Change at Ely for Peterborough & King's Lynn. Times may change slightly from 18/05/2008.

Lakenheath Fen

Weekend Trains






Produced by the Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership
THE NATIONAL TRUST RSPB
working with National Express. The production of this leaflet has been made possible thanks to funding from National Express, Forest Heath District Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.
Sponsored by The National Lottery
Details correct as of March 2008.
Widen the Choice can be contacted on 01603 697 515 or chris.wood@rspb.org.uk.
The National Trust and RSPB are registered charities (see 2008/06 and 2010/06 respectively).
Printed on 100% recycled paper by The Saxon Print Group (01603 759 560).

RSPB Lakenheath Fen

Lakenheath Fen reserve is a mixture of wetland and woodland south of the Little Ouse in Suffolk. Best known for its breeding golden orioles, it is a year-round birdwatching spectacle and a wetland filled with life: marsh harriers, hobbies, bearded tits, lapwings, redshanks and reed warblers abound. And bitterns boom again.

The reserve is open daily, from dawn to dusk. The visitor centre, open 09:30-16:30 March to October, offers information and toilets. Bring a packed lunch and drinks. There are nature trails to walk and regular events are on offer - ask for a leaflet. To top it all, you can now get to this wonderful reserve the green and hassle-free way: by train!

From carrot fields to reed-fringed pools

Eleven years ago, the land that is now Lakenheath Fen nature reserve was a series of carrot fields with little to offer in the way of wildlife interest. Like most of Fenland, its wetlands had been lost to agriculture centuries before. Since 1995, the RSPB has been working to restore about 200 ha of the reserve to a mosaic of washland, wet reedbed, ungrazed fen and wet grassland.

Our work includes managing the reedbeds, grazing and controlling water levels. This has encouraged a variety of birds, as well as other wetland wildlife. With its wetlands restored, Lakenheath Fen will join a network of other fenland nature reserves. These include Wicken Fen, Chippenham Fen, Woodwalton Fen and the washlands of the rivers Great Ouse and Nene. Many are now undergoing similar restoration and extension projects.

Together they will help to restore the natural character and wildlife of the Fens - new freshwater wetlands secure from the threat of rising sea levels.

Lakenheath Fen also contains an area of damp, poplar-dominated woodland. We are managing this habitat for its breeding golden orioles, which are a major attraction for birdwatchers in the spring.

High Fen Farm and the Brecks

South of the railway lies High Fen Farm, which has rare breeds and is managed by traditional farming methods, with support from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The farm can be viewed from special conservation walks.

Lakenheath Fen lies at the edge of Breckland, and traditionally the rural economy encompassed both landscapes. The original 'brecks' were fields in intermittent use, and today Breckland offers a rich mixture of farmland, forest and heathland, such as that looked after by Norfolk Wildlife Trust at nearby Weeting Heath.

Breckland is also rich in heritage, particularly that of the flint-knapping industry, dating back to the Stone Age. Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 228 and 229 will help you explore!

The Hereward Way

Commemorating the Anglo-Saxon resistance to the Norman invasion, led by Hereward the Wake in 1070/1, this long-distance path runs from Harling Road station, east of Thetford, through Brandon and Ely and across the Fens.

Hereward held the Isle of Ely until deserted by his Danish supporters and betrayed by the monks of the abbey. The path runs between RSPB Lakenheath Fen and the river Little Ouse, down which the monks of Ely, in an earlier piece of infamy in 974, took the remains of St Withburga, having stolen them from East Dereham!

The Hereward Way also follows a byway eastwards from Lakenheath station, forming a good way to walk to Brandon (4.5 miles / 7.5 km).




Figure 4. Leaflet for the Yare Valley

Information and Other Attractions



RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, Buckenham & Cantley Marshes:
01603 715 191, www.rspb.org.uk

RSPB Berney Marshes and Breydon Water:
01493 700 845, www.rspb.org.uk

National Rail Enquiries: 08457 48 40 50, www.nationalrail.co.uk

National Express: 0845 600 7245, nationalexpress.co.uk

Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership: www.wherrylines.org.uk

Traveline - for buses: 0871 200 22 33, www.traveline.org.uk

The Broads Authority - all you need to know about the Broads: 01603 810 734, www.broads-authority.gov.uk

Wherry Yacht Charter - summer static tours with historic wherry yachts & a pleasure wherry: www.wherryyachtcharter.org

Southern Belle - steamers between Gt. Yarmouth, Berney and Reedham: contact Gt. Yarmouth Tourist Info: 01493 842 195

City Boats - boat tours from Norwich: www.cityboats.co.uk

Winter Boat trips on Breydon Water - from Goodchild Marina, Burgh Castle: contact RSPB Strumpshaw Fen: 01603 715 191

Berney Arms Windmill - currently closed for conservation, English Heritage: www.english-heritage.org.uk

Pettit's Animal Adventure Park - family fun near Reedham: 01493 700 094, www.pettitsadventurepark.co.uk

Strumpshaw Steam Museum: 01603 714 535, www.strumpshawsteamuseum.co.uk

Wherryman's Way - long-distance footpath and the Yare Valley Cycle Route: www.wherrymanaway.net

Weavers' Way - long-distance footpath from Gt. Yarmouth to Cromer: www.countrysideaccess.norfolk.gov.uk

Train Times (Sundays)

Norwich	07:36	09:36	11:36	13:36	15:36	16:57
Brundall	07:44	09:44	11:44	13:44	15:44	17:05
Buckenham	—	09:48	11:48	—	15:48	17:09
Cantley	07:50	09:52	11:52	13:50	15:52	17:13
Reedham	07:55	09:56	11:56	13:55	15:56	17:17
Berney Arms	08:01	10:03	12:03	14:01	—	—
Gt. Yarmouth	08:11	10:13	12:13	14:11	16:11	—
Lowestoft	—	—	—	—	—	17:41
Gt. Yarmouth	08:20	—	10:18	12:18	14:20	16:20
Lowestoft	—	09:50	—	—	—	—
Berney Arms	08:27	—	10:25	12:25	14:27	—
Reedham	08:34	10:12	10:32	12:32	14:34	16:32
Cantley	08:38	10:16	10:36	12:36	14:38	16:36
Buckenham	—	10:20	10:40	12:40	—	16:40
Brundall	08:45	10:24	10:44	12:44	14:45	16:44
Norwich	08:55	10:34	10:55	12:55	14:55	16:55


This is not a complete timetable - other trains, that do not stop at Buckenham or Berney Arms, can form part of your day out; see the National Express timetable or the Wherry Lines Line Guide. Times may change slightly from 18th May 2008.


x: Trains call at Buckenham and Berney Arms by request - tell the conductor you want to get off and give a clear signal to an approaching train to get on.

Bank Holidays: check with National Express that it's a Sunday service. In the event of engineering works, replacement buses do not call at Buckenham or Berney Arms. Other days of the week: There is a train a day at Berney Arms (two May-Sept.) Mon-Sat, and one at Buckenham Saturday; see the full timetable.

Explore the Yare Valley

Sunday Trains






Produced by the Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership

working with National Express and the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, and supported by National Express and the Broads Authority Sustainable Development Fund with grant provided by DEFRA.

Details correct as of March 2008.

Widen the Choice can be contacted on 01603 697 815.

The National Trust and RSPB are registered charities (no. 263866 and 207878 respectively).

Printed on 100% recycled paper by The Saxon Print Group (01603 789 560).




The stations on the Wherry Lines are like pearls on a string - explore the treasures of the Yare valley by train!

The Yare valley is a wonderful landscape, and an under-appreciated part of the Broads! On Sundays, the railway is a perfect way to explore - and using the small stations, you can be straight off the train into the countryside!

Footpaths and quiet lanes mean you can discover the whole valley: river, marshes, estuary, villages and wildlife. Berney Arms, Cantley and Reedham have places to eat and drink too. So whether your interest is birdwatching, rambling, cycling, churches, boats or Broadland heritage, ask for a Wherry Lines Rover ticket and explore!

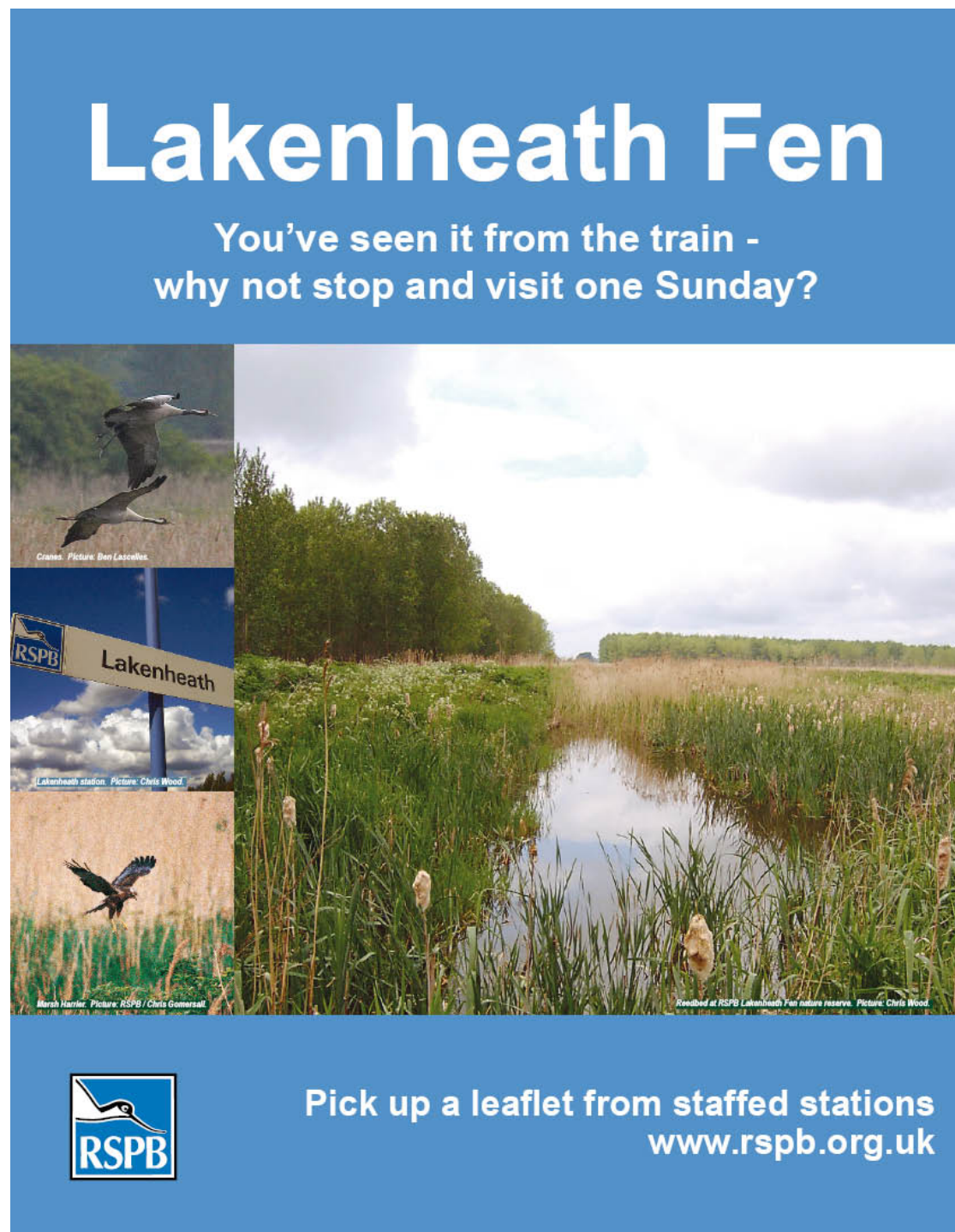
RSPB Strumpshaw Fen is in the heart of the Norfolk Broads. The complex of reedbeds, fens, wet meadows, grazing marshes, scrub and wet woodland, connected by a maze of rivers, dykes and open pools, is characteristic of Broadland and supports an outstanding diversity of wildlife. Nature trails lead you through the varied habitats, including reedbeds and woodland. In the summer, there is a special trail in the flower-filled meadow, and you may hear a bearded tit or see a swallowtail butterfly near the reedbeds. Strumpshaw Fen is just a mile from Buckenham station and you get free admission if you show your train ticket!

RSPB Buckenham and Cantley Marshes are traditionally managed grazing marshes, supporting important numbers of breeding waders and wintering ducks and geese. Buckenham Marshes are right outside Buckenham station, while Cantley Marshes are easily reached from Cantley railway station. (N.B. the footpath across Cantley Marshes can be flooded at times.)

Experience the wide-open spaces of grazing marshes at RSPB Berney Marshes and mudflats at RSPB Breydon Water. Long-distance footpaths follow Breydon Water between Reedham, Berney and Great Yarmouth, where there is a hide (not RSPB), a short walk from Yarmouth station. At Berney Marshes, there is a nature trail and a viewing screen overlooking the marshes. Berney Marshes is a reserve you cannot get to by car - a short walk from Berney Arms station!

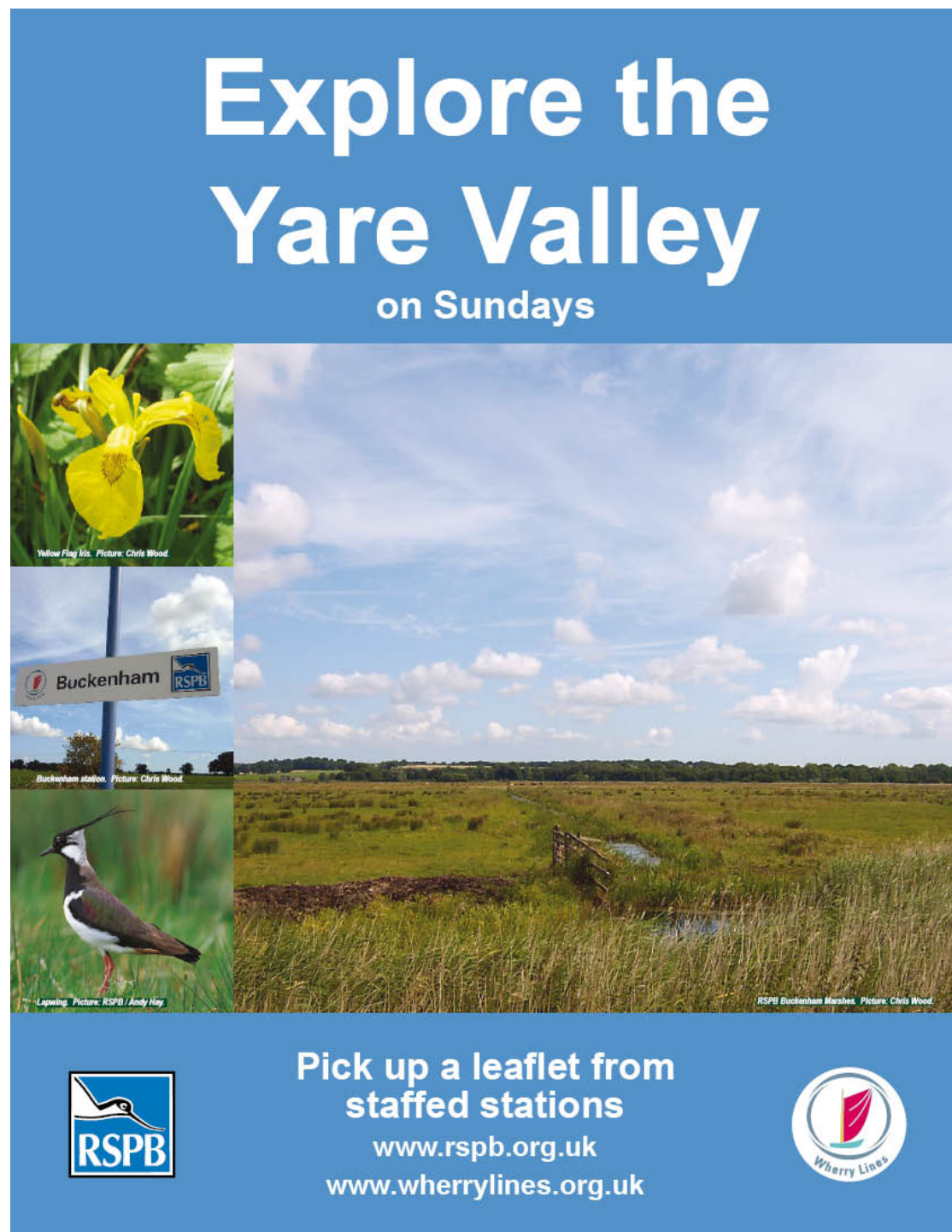


Figure 5. Poster for Lakenheath Fen



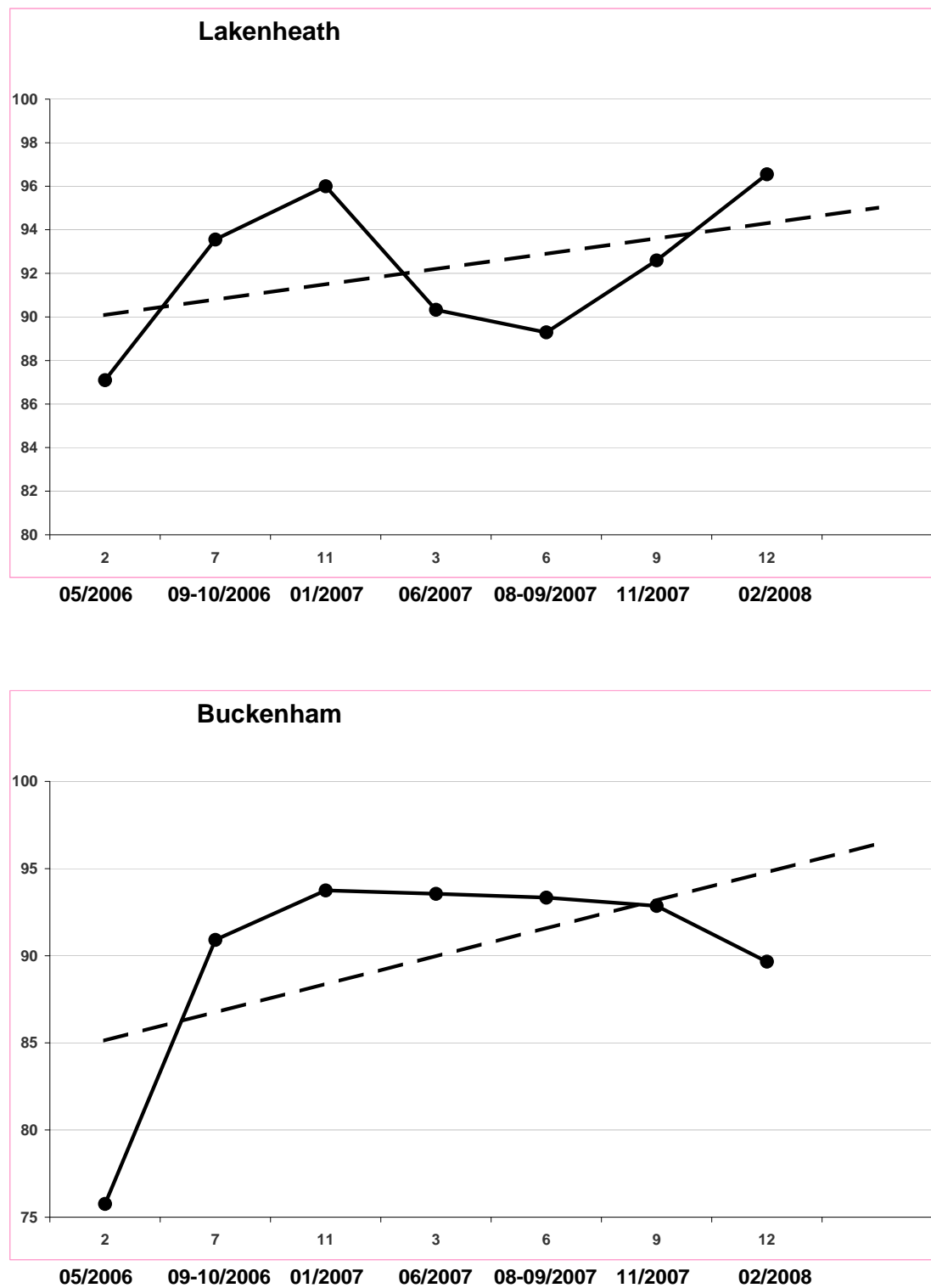
national express

Figure 6. Poster for the Yare Valley



national express

Figure 7. Condition of Lakenheath and Buckenham stations



N.B.: the periods in which audits were made do not correspond to the periods given in Table 3.

6. RESULTS

6.1 The Impact on Patronage

The main measure of patronage change available is ticket sales. The data for the year before and after the May 2007 timetable change are presented in Figure 8, below (see Table 3 for period explanations), and summarised in Table 2, below. As well as Lakenheath and Buckenham, the impact on Berney Arms has been considered, as it has been promoted along with Buckenham in the 'Explore the Yare Valley' leaflet.

Both Lakenheath and Buckenham saw significant increases, particularly Lakenheath, although from a particularly low base at Buckenham. Some of the troughs in the graphs in Figure 8 are due to engineering work (during which there was no service at Lakenheath, Buckenham or Berney Arms at all), particularly period 5 at Lakenheath. Berney Arms is more complicated, in that a noticeable increase in use in the period May to November disappeared in December, for reasons unknown.

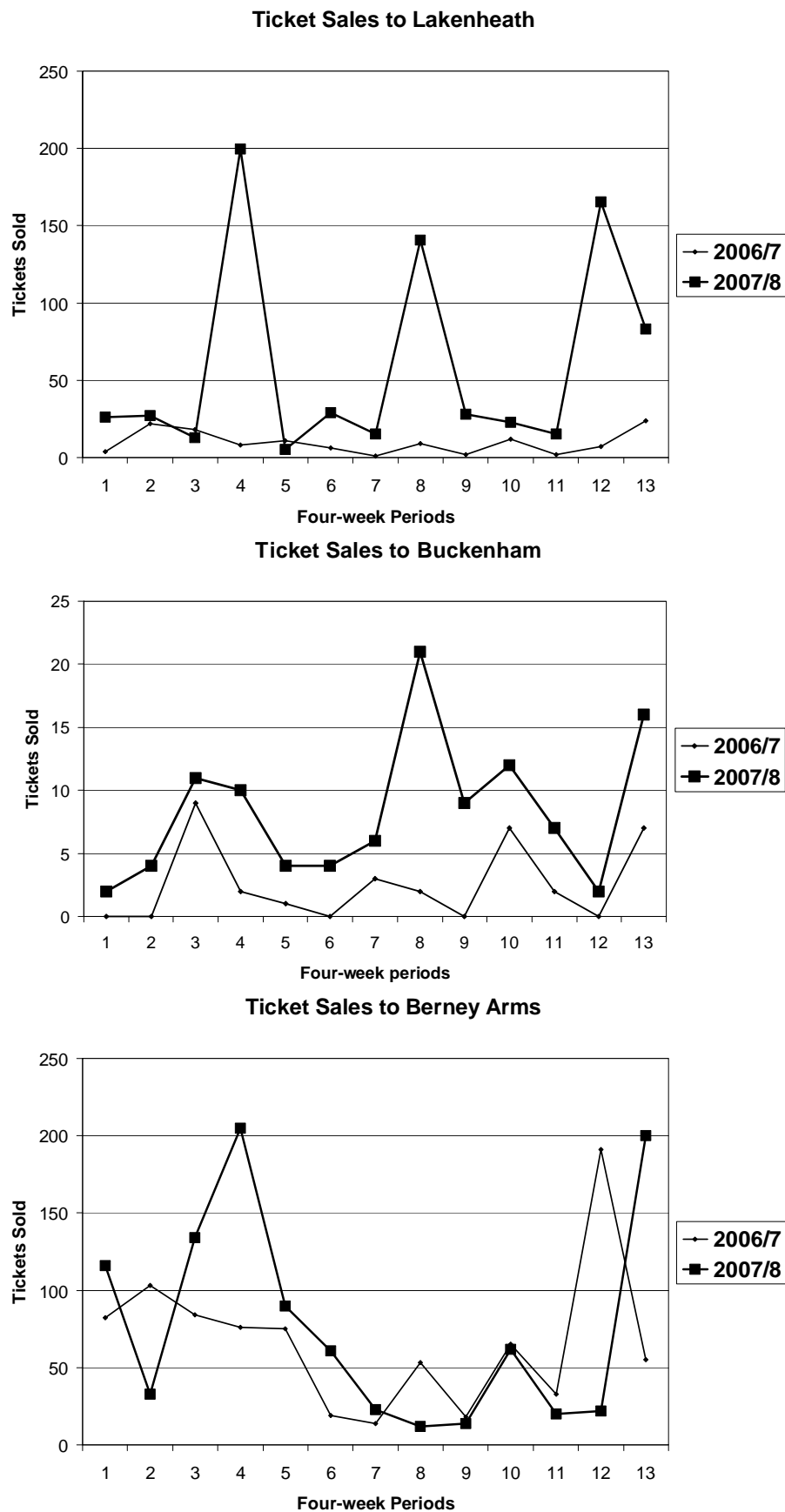
Table 2. Return ticket sales, May to May, in 2006/7 and 2007/8

Station	2006/7	2007/8	Change	Comments
Lakenheath	126	770	511%	Peak of 200 tickets mid-August to mid-September (compared to 8 the previous year); smaller peaks in December and April.
Buckenham	33	108	227%	Peak of 21 tickets in December (compared to 2 the previous year).
Berney Arms	868	992	14%	Peak of 205 tickets mid-August to mid-September (compared to 76 the previous year). Significant drop in December-April. <i>N.B.</i> 191 tickets in April 2007, compared with 59 the previous year, <i>before</i> promotion, but corresponding to the 200 seen in May 2008.

Table 3. Period key for Figure 8, below

Period	Approximate Dates	Period	Approximate Dates
1	27th May to 23rd June	8	9th Dec. to 5th January
2	24th June to 21st July	9	From 6th January
3	22nd July to 18th August	10	February
4	19th August to 15th Sept.	11	March
5	16th Sept. to 13th October	12	April
6	14th Oct. to 10th Nov.	13	To 26th May
7	11th Nov. to 8th Dec.		

Figure 8. Ticket sales in 2006/7 and 2007/8



See Table 3, above, for an explanation of the four-week periods in this figure.

The limitation of these data is that ticket sales to and from specific stations are not the same as actual footfall. The main differences are:

- the use of 'rover' and 'ranger' tickets;
- the use of season tickets by longer distance commuters;
- journey breaks, where people stop off at an intermediate station (allowed with some ticket types), then continue their journey in the same direction later; and...
- the use of stations in one direction only – in other words, where a passenger uses some other form of transport for either the outward or return leg of their journey to or from that station.

'Rover' and 'ranger' ticket use is expected to be quite common (principally the Anglia Plus ranger ticket in the case of Lakenheath and the Wherry Lines Rover ticket in the case of Buckenham and Berney Arms), although actual levels are unknown. Many people commute between Norwich and Cambridge, or intermediate stations, likewise into Norwich on the Wherry Lines, so that weekend leisure usage will be common. Journey breaks are expected to be limited, but do appear to occur (as shown in Table 4, below).

The use of stations in one direction only is more complicated, in that a passenger may, for the other leg of their journey:

- be given a lift in a friend's or relative's car;
- use a bus service (although this is less likely in rural Norfolk and Suffolk on a Sunday, and even on Saturdays there are no bus services very close to the stations in question);
- cycle to or from home (evidence for this is limited, although it is promoted); or...
- walk (or cycle) to or from another station.

Walking to or from another station is likely to be the most significant category in the present case. Some people are known to call at RSPB Lakenheath Fen and then walk (or cycle) to Brandon station along the Hereward Way long-distance path (4.5 miles or 7.5 km), or via the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Weeting Heath reserve (5.5 miles or 9 km). The promotion of stations in the Yare valley emphasises walking between them, and Buckenham to Brundall (2.5 miles or 4 km) or Cantley (4 miles or 6.5 km), and Berney Arms to Great Yarmouth (5.5 miles or 9 km) are common choices.

This activity necessitates purchasing either a 'rover' ticket or a return ticket to the station on the walk furthest from the passenger's origin station. It is also to be expected that people will walk from a station with a low frequency service to one with a higher frequency service.

Buckenham is the station of those in question most likely to be affected by this phenomenon. Norwich is the major market and the Buckenham-Cantley walk is promoted, suggesting that a proportion of people buying tickets to Cantley (further from Norwich than Buckenham) may be alighting at Buckenham on their outward journey. This would raise the use of Buckenham as measured by ticket sales, and lower that at Cantley. However, without actual counts of

people boarding and alighting, it is not possible to estimate the magnitude, or even the direction, of this effect.

To this end, counts of those boarding and alighting at Lakenheath and Buckenham were made by train conductors at the end of June and beginning of July 2007. The results for Lakenheath are shown in Table 4, below. During these counts, no-one used Buckenham. With hindsight, the counts took place too early, as promotional material had not been distributed for very long. The fact that there was use of the Lakenheath service at this time depended on word of mouth and the fact that an enthusiastic RSPB staff member took a stall to Cambridge station at the timetable change. The figures in Table 4 are not, therefore, a perfect measure, but they do give an early indication of the complexity of journey patterns, as indicated in the comments.

Similar counts were due to take place in late June 2008, but ticket sales data are not yet available for a corresponding period.

Table 4. Conductor counts of passengers at Lakenheath, June/July 2007

Train	Direction	Departure time	Nos. on	Nos. off	Comment
24th June 2007					
1K67	NRW-CBG	09:15	0	1	Three people came from the Norwich direction, one returned.
1K73	NRW-CBG	11:15	0	2	
1K83	NRW-CBG	15:15	5	0	
1K68	CBG-NRW	10:44	1	2	Four people came from the Cambridge direction, five returned.
1K72	CBG-NRW	12:46	0	2	
1K78	CBG-NRW	15:38	0	0	
1st July 2007					
1K67	NRW-CBG	09:15	1	0	One person came from and returned in the Norwich direction.
1K73	NRW-CBG	11:15	0	0	
1K83	NRW-CBG	15:15	2	0	
1K68	CBG-NRW	10:44	1	6	Six people came from the Cambridge direction, but only two returned.
1K72	CBG-NRW	12:46	0	0	
1K78	CBG-NRW	15:38	0	0	

NRW = Norwich; CBG = Cambridge

6.2 Partnership Relationships

One of the four key business objectives of National Express is "Progressive Partnerships". The objectives are carefully thought-through and are designed to ensure that managers within the business remain focused on improving the service offered to the customer, are innovative and forward thinking, and in this case help to build a reputation of being the first-choice transport operator for the East of England. This initiative could not have been delivered without the excellent partnership working that had gone before and the significant co-operation and willingness to succeed by partners involved. Links between the partners are now stronger than ever and this initiative is considered best practice and likely to prove the catalyst for other similar projects across National Express.

7. THE FUTURE

It is likely that this initiative has single-handedly secured the future of the railway stations at Buckenham, Lakenheath and to a lesser extent Berney Arms. Altering the train service pattern, to one that aligns itself to the attraction of the location, now provides the impetus for future service and facility enhancements at these small-use stations. Improving Saturday train services is something that is already being looked at and green energy is likely to make dawn and dusk calls at Berney Arms and Buckenham possible in the future (tying in with the bird 'spectacle'). Through this initiative, these stations have moved from a category that could have been considered for closure, to one with a much brighter outlook for the future.

In addition to the work described in this paper, Widen the Choice, the RSPB and The National Trust are engaged with National Express elsewhere in the region, either directly or through the four Community Rail Partnerships on its network. Wrabness and Rye House stations are particularly in focus for the RSPB, with Stour Estuary and Rye Meads reserves, respectively, close by. Elsewhere in the region, Widen the Choice is engaged with railway interests at Sandy (First Capital Connect), close to the RSPB's national headquarters, and Tring (Tring Station Gateway Project).

Community Rail Partnerships themselves are working to encourage use of the train for countryside access, assisted by county council countryside teams and relevant Areas of Outstanding National Beauty⁷. National Express actively promotes a variety of rural destinations and is engaged with East of England Tourism's 'Let's Go' campaign.

The work described in this paper, along with these wider initiatives, points the way towards a bigger partnership between the railways and countryside access. As sketched in Table 1, above, many smaller stations have real potential for helping people get out into the countryside by sustainable means. Countryside access by train not only assists the health, recreational access, social inclusion and sustainable transport agendas, it also increases off-peak and counter-peak rail patronage, which is good for the railway business and

makes use of under-used assets. Small stations can, then, be valuable gateways to the countryside.

Indeed, there is scope for a network of rail gateways to the countryside across the country, and the East of England in particular, supported by strategic marketing and sensitive, but recognisable branding. Local walks, interpretation panels, signage, downloadable guides or itineraries⁸, enhanced foot, cycle and bus (including demand-responsive) facilities, and station improvements could all come together as a recognisable package. Promoting this package would then benefit the environment, public health and the viability of local train services. Widen the Choice and National Express will be working with partners to forward this vision.

CONTACT DETAILS

Chris Wood

Transport Partnership Officer
Widen the Choice Rural Transport Partnership
RSPB
Stalham House, 65 Thorpe Road
NORWICH NR1 1UD
01603 – 697 515
chris.wood@rspb.org.uk

Clive Morris

Business Director – Rural Services
National Express East Anglia
Room 11, Norwich Station
Station Approach
NORWICH NR1 1EF
01603 – 675 228
clive.morris@nationalexpress.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baumgartner, C., Molitor, R., and Stuppäck, S. (eds.) (2006) *Environmentally Friendly Travelling in Europe: Challenges and Innovations Facing Environment, Transport and Tourism*, European Expert Conference Brochure, Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Vienna.

Bird, W. (2004) *Natural Fit: Can Green Space and Biodiversity Increase Levels of Physical Activity?* RSPB, Sandy.

Cope, A., Cairns, S., Fox, K., Lawlor, D.A., Lockie, M., Lumsdon, L., Riddoch, C., and Rosen, P. (2003) The UK National Cycle Network: an assessment of the benefits of a sustainable transport infrastructure, *World Transport Policy and Practice* 9 (1) 6-17.

Guiver, J., and Lumsdon, L. (2006) *Tourism on Board: Report of a Survey of Buses in Tourist Areas, August 2005*, Institute of Transport and Tourism, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

Maas, J., Verheij, R.A., Groenewegen, P.P., Vries, S. de, and Spreeuwenberg, P. (2006) Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* **60** 587-92.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2008) *Promoting and Creating Built or Natural Environments that Encourage and Support Physical Activity*, NICE Public Health Guidance 8, London.

National Trust, The (2005) *Visitor Travel: Policy from Practice*, NT, Swindon.

Natural England (2006) *Strategic Direction 2006 – 2009*, Natural England, Peterborough.

Nichols, C. (2005) *Gateway Stations: A Partnership Story: Final report on the two-year pilot programme*, Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham.

Salveson, P. (1993) *New Futures for Rural Rail: An Agenda for Action*, Transnet, London.

Pretty, J., Griffin, M., Peacock, J., Hine, R., Sellens, M., and South, N. (2005) *A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise*, Countryside Recreation Network, Sheffield.

Sustrans (2007) *The Economic Impact of Cycle Tourism in North East England*, Sustrans, Bristol.

Wood, C. (2005) Can Cinderella get to the ball? Implementing the green travel, countryside access and social inclusion agenda in rural leisure travel, *Proceedings of the Third Transport Practitioners' Meeting*, PTRC, London.

Wood, C. (2007) Green access audits in the countryside, *Proceedings of the Fifth Transport Practitioners' Meeting*, PTRC, London.

Notes

¹ Guiver and Lumsdon (2006) show visitors by bus spending at levels comparable to the average tourist; Cope *et al* (2003) demonstrate this or better for cyclists; and Sustrans (2007) emphasises: "Cycling activity is important to local supply chains, with major implications for the circulation of income in the local tourism economy". This is particularly because those travelling without cars cannot carry as much and have less flexibility in their travel choices, so spending more locally on food and accommodation in particular.

² According to the 2001 census (<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>), 26.8% of households across England had no access to a car. In the East of England as a whole, the figure was 19.8%. However, the Cities of Norwich and Cambridge, with their direct rail links to the stations described in this paper, had 31.8% and 35.5% of their households without cars. Looking at central and inner urban areas, close to railway stations, ward-level figures of 40.7% (Southtown and Cobholm ward, Gt. Yarmouth), 41.5% (Thorpe Hamlet ward, Norwich), 45.4% (Market ward, Cambridge) and 48.2% (Harbour ward, Lowestoft) emerge.

³ CoastLink is a demand-responsive bus service aimed at visitors and locals (Wood, 2005).

⁴ NNR: National Nature Reserve.

⁵ Now Vice-Chair of the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership.

⁶ Sustainable Development Fund is from a grant provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

⁷ There are too many initiatives to acknowledge them all, but special mention must go to the work in this region of the following: the East Suffolk Lines CRP for its station-to-station walks; Suffolk County Council for its work on linking Demand Responsive Transport to stations (see³); the Bittern Line and Wherry Lines CRPs for their walks programmes; Norfolk County Council for its new signs at stations to promote local Public Rights of Way and Access Land; Forest Heath District Council for its interpretation panel at Brandon station; the work of the Marston Vale Line CRP on countryside access; and the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project for its efforts to link Manningtree station into Dedham Vale.

⁸ Widen the Choice has worked with businesses and others in the region's protected landscapes to develop the 'Car(e)-Free Itineraries' concept for Natural England. The idea of this is to assist people in the countryside to create itineraries that can be followed by visitors without using a car. The first of the resulting itineraries has been created by Bryan Harker of the Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership, with Bures station, on the Sudbury branch or 'Gainsborough Line', as its start point, and is available from the CRP's web-site (<http://www.esscrp.org.uk>) and that of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project (<http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org>).