

Final phase of Greater Anglia's new trains transition begins

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The final phase of Greater Anglia's £1.4 billion fleet replacement programme begins next week. Monday 3 April will see the last pre-planned use of the remaining older Class 321 trains, after which just a handful of those electric trains will remain available for use, for a few more weeks, as short notice spare trains or to provide flexibility in the event of disruption or other unplanned developments.

Monday will see Class 321s scheduled to be used on services between Colchester and Walton-on-the-Naze throughout the day, so anyone wishing to take a last trip on one before they are withdrawn from regular service is encouraged to take a final trip whilst they can.

From then on, any deployment of the Class 321 trains in normal service would only be on an ad hoc, short notice basis, as appropriate.

Greater Anglia has already announced a Class 321 Farewell charity charter train on Saturday 29 April, to mark the upcoming withdrawal of the trains from use on the Greater Anglia network.

The event, aimed primarily at rail enthusiasts, will raise funds for three charities relevant to the Greater

Anglia operating area – East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices (EACH), Havens Hospices and the Railway Mission. It will run from London Liverpool Street to Clacton, Walton, Harwich Town, Stowmarket, back to Shenfield, to Southend Victoria and finally back to London Liverpool Street, covering many of the core routes with which the Class 321s have been closely associated for much of their life.

The price for this “one-off” trip is £70 (or £35 for children aged 5 – 15), with all profits from the event shared between EACH, Havens Hospices, and the Railway Mission. Bookings can only be made on-line at : <https://railplus.greateranglia.co.uk/class-321-farewell-charity-train-event.html>. Anyone with any queries about the event can ring 0345 600 7245 and choose option 3, followed by option 2 to find out more details.

The Class 321 electric units have been used on suburban and commuter services in East Anglia for over 30 years, but are now being replaced by Greater Anglia’s brand-new Class 720 trains, which have a number of benefits for passengers, including more seats, plug and USB points, enhanced performance characteristics and better accessibility arrangements.

Already 101 of the new Class 720 suburban trains are in service, operating the vast majority of Greater Anglia’s commuter and local services in Essex and Hertfordshire, along with services between London Liverpool Street and Cambridge and stopping services between London Liverpool Street and Ipswich.

Meanwhile, 10 new intercity electric trains are running between Norwich, Ipswich, Colchester and London, 10 new electric trains are operating Stansted Express services between the capital and the airport, and 38 new regional bi-mode trains are operating local services across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and on the Marks Tey to Sudbury branch.

As well as providing a more comfortable journey and increased seating capacity, the new trains have already been a key factor in increasing punctuality and reliability across the Greater Anglia network to historically high levels, with annual performance across its routes consistently between 92% and 95% for the last three years (and some individual routes achieving annual results of between 95% and 98%).

Now, as the last of the older trains are being phased out, the focus is on maintaining and, wherever possible further improving, those high service standards, which also saw Greater Anglia win three Golden Whistles awards for the highest performance standards at the annual industry event, organised by the Chartered Institute of Railway Operators and Modern Railways magazine and held earlier this month, which celebrates best practice in UK railway operations.

Jonathan Denby, Head of Corporate Affairs, Greater Anglia said: “The last day of pre-planned, scheduled use of the Class 321 trains in normal service, on Monday, marks the start of the last phase of our transition to a Greater Anglia network fully operated by new trains. We’re looking forward to reaching that point, in the weeks ahead, at which everyone of our customers will benefit from the extra seating capacity, more comfortable journeys, improved accessibility and better performance that our new trains offer.

“In the meantime, anyone wishing to bid their farewells to the Class 321s has a chance to do so with their final planned use in service between Colchester and Walton-on-the-Naze on Monday 3 April and on the Class 321 Farewell charity charter train on Saturday 29 April.”

Photo credit: Greater Anglia