



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

JULY 2009 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the July Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters Association.

1. **BCA 2009**

The 2009 AGM was held on 12th May at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road. Apologies for the late change of venue which was caused by the late notification that the Dom Polski Club (our normal venue) had ceased trading. Apologies also for the disturbances during the meeting caused by other events in the RAFA Club. We will endeavour to choose a different day of the week for the 2010 meeting!

In attendance were 30 members. The meeting opened with the agreeing of last years minutes, the Chairman's report and the Treasurer's report. This was followed by the election of the Officers and Committee:

Chairman	Arthur Taylor
Treasurer	Jim Allwood
Secretary	Eva Culleton-Oltay
Membership Secretary	John MacLeod
Press Officer	Andrew Long
Committee	Jane Ramsell, Mark Spurgeon, Ben Foley, John Henderson

John Henderson is welcomed as a new member. Others are still needed!

There followed presentations by FCC (Andy Cope and Larry Heyman) and EMT (Gareth Leslie and Paul Handley). Both presentations are on the BCA website.

The meeting finished with a lively Question and Answer session, mainly directed at the EMT representatives - the main concerns still being the evening peak service and lack of a stop at Bedford on the 17.30.

2. **East Midlands Trains (EMT) update.**

The BCA has continued to lobby for the reinstatement of a Bedford stop in the 17.30 from St. Pancras. Additionally the BCA are particularly unhappy with the treatment that Bedford has received in the EMT timetable & consequently have continued to press the case for a comprehensive service review. This lobbying has been through the DfT, ORR, MPs, London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus. The BCA have also contacted RailFuture and TravelWatch East Midlands.

Discussions are on-going with EMT. We hope the new Bedford unitary local authority will also lend its weight to the current debate, as it became responsible for transport planning, public transport, etc., from 1st April 2009 and have to update the Local Transport Plan (LTP 3).

3. **Introduction into service of Class 377/5 EMUs by FCC**

On the Thameslink route FCC still have only six trains compared to the planned 23 that should have arrived in March 2009. Despite this, performance is holding up well, and as more new trains arrive, FCC hope to push performance upwards and reduce cancellations this summer.

Bombardier's deliveries continue to run late. They attribute this to several of their major suppliers having had cash flow problems earlier in the year, which caused serious delays in the flow of components. There continue to be teething problems as new trains are delivered (to Selhurst) and the initial test mileage which has to be accumulated before the train can go into public service.

All 6 units were recently out of service for a week following problems with the power transmission equipment which has now been resolved. An issue with the power supply switchover at Farringdon has now been resolved with a change to the train software.

4. FCC Hornsey Stakeholder event

Several of the BCA committee attended this event. A presentation was given by Jim Morgan, the interim FCC Managing Director, outlining the recent performance of FCC, the challenges ahead, works being undertaken at various FCC stations, and the Thameslink Programme. There was then a presentation by Ian Duncan, Head of Fleet, outlining the work that is done at Hornsey Depot. There followed a tour of the depot and the meeting concluded with a Question and Answer session.

5. Kings Cross St Pancras - Northern Ticket Hall

The new Northern Ticket Hall at the Underground Station is on schedule to open in December 2009. When open this will provide :-

- New pedestrian tunnels to the Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria lines.
- Step free access to all Underground lines at the station.
- New and much shorter direct interchange between Thameslink and deep level tubes.
- Less congestion throughout the station.

Further information can be found on the following website www.tfl.gov.uk/kings-cross

6. Regulated fares

There has been recent speculation on the likely next annual fare-round in January 2010. Regulated train fares are fixed to a formula of :

- RPI inflation plus 1 percentage point
- The RPI rate used to set fares is the July figure (the annual rate of RPI inflation in June dropped to minus 1.6 per cent)
- If July's figure is -1.7 per cent fares would fall by 0.7 per cent (- 1.7 + 1.0)
- Regulated fares include season tickets & many longer-distance, off-peak fares

Current indications from Government are that this formula will be adhered to, despite the unintended consequences!

7. Weekend promotional fare

Throughout the summer FCC will be offering special discounted weekend tickets. On all weekends from 20 June to 6 September 2009, Super Off-Peak Day Returns to London will offer savings of at least 25%, and the normal off-peak London Travelcard ticket price is reduced by around 20%. The tickets can be used in conjunction with hundreds of "2for1" offers on London's top attractions including London Zoo, Madame Tussauds, The London Dungeon, HMS Belfast, Tower of London, and Thames river trips. ([Vouchers can be downloaded from the First Capital Connect website](#)). To complete a cost effective day out, as always children aged 5 to 15, can travel for £2 off-peak when accompanied by an adult. Members can find out more at www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/london.

8. FCC Ticket Office Opening Hours

Following the BCA response to Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch on the recent FCC Ticket Office Opening Hours Consultation, the BCA have received the following information from London Travel Watch:

First Capital Connect changes to booking office hours

You may recall that you contacted us earlier this year in relation to the proposed changes to booking office hours by First Capital Connect. At the time we informed you that we had submitted a formal objection to the proposals on the basis that they would significantly reduce the ability of passengers to access rail products at the stations affected. In addition, we also stated that we were hopeful that the company would reconsider their proposals in the light of our and passengers' concerns about the impact of their proposals.

I am pleased to inform you that, following extensive negotiations with First Capital Connect (in collaboration with Passenger Focus), we have been able to achieve a significantly better proposal for change than had originally been proposed.

In particular, the following changes to the original proposal have been agreed:

- All of First Capital Connect's stations will retain their booking office facilities and will remain staffed, although the exact booking office opening hours may change;
- Over 30% of the booking office opening hours (226 1/2 hours per week) that had been proposed to be cut will be retained, and some stations (such as Alexandra Palace and Loughborough Junction) will remain open at evening and weekends when they would have been otherwise unstaffed;
- No station booking offices will be closed where the average number of booking office transactions exceed the Secretary of State's agreed minimum standard of 12 ticket sales per hour;
- In response to our objection to reducing ticket office opening hours at London Blackfriars, Elephant & Castle and Loughborough Junction, First Capital Connect have agreed to retain the existing opening hours except on those weekends where no services are running from these stations due to engineering works;
- For a trial period of two months, First Capital Connect will provide staff at eight stations that will be able to support passengers using the ticket machines and provide general assistance. At the end of the trial, a further review will be undertaken to assess any passenger problems with obtaining tickets with a view to permanently restoring booking office facilities at these stations where problems arise;
- City Thameslink, London Blackfriars, Finsbury Park, Bedford, Luton Airport Parkway, Hertford North, St Albans, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City stations are staffed 24 hours per day. At most of these stations, tickets will be available from staff at ticket barriers for those unable to purchase tickets at ticket machines when booking offices are closed. In addition, the ticket office will remain open at Hertford North on Sundays for Arsenal and some other Premiership home matches;
- First Capital Connect have agreed to ensure that facilities such as waiting rooms which would have been affected by a removal of booking office hours will be kept open;
- First Capital Connect have promised to upgrade their ticket machines to enable them to issue weekly and monthly season tickets which are currently only available at ticket offices, and will install top up facilities for Oyster cards at London stations. Changes are being made to maintenance regimes to ensure that ticket machines are available and have adequate change and ticket stock wherever possible;
- First Capital Connect have promised additional security measures at stations and works to tackle lineside graffiti at a number of locations and to consider introducing a 'Community Ambassador' scheme to encourage use of the railway by people who currently are not rail users. Customer Information Screens are being installed at all stations on the Wimbledon Loop providing advice on delays and cancellations to services;
- There will be an extension to booking office opening hours at some stations including Elstree & Borehamwood and Harpenden stations.

Very recently, the BCA has been informed of the following changes to the ticket office hours at Bedford:

	Old	New
Monday to Friday	05.45 to midnight	05.45 to 21.00
Saturday	05.45 to 20.00	05.45 to 21.00
Sunday	07.00 to 21.45	07.15 to 21.45

No changes to the Flitwick times have been notified to the BCA at this time.

9. Thameslink Programme Work.

The platforms at St Albans station are now being extended ready to take the longer 12-carriage trains to be introduced as part of the Thameslink Programme, the first of which should begin to enter service in 2012.

For safety reasons, Transport for London has closed the eastern pavement of Blackfriars road bridge while the station is being rebuilt. This affects anyone heading south of the river. In August there will be more changes, this time to walking routes within the station.

Platform Extensions -

Bedford - planned completion 2011

Flitwick - planned completion 2010

Blackfriars -

Major work under way to strengthen bridge and build 12 car platforms.

Eastern side pavement of Blackfriars Bridge closed by TfL.

August/September - platform 5 moves south, main entrance moves, outside pedestrian subway closes, new platform footbridge opens.

New Trains -

Neal Lawson has been appointed New Trains Director as part of a core team to go through the evaluation and negotiation phases.

See www.thameslinkprogramme.co.uk for more details.

10. Change in Managing Director at FCC

Elaine Holt the MD of FCC has now left the company to become Chief Executive designate of the re-nationalised East Coast Franchise. She has been replaced by Jim Morgan. Elaine had been MD of FCC since 2006 when FCC took over the Thameslink Franchise. During this time she oversaw the implementation of the Class 319 refurbishment, improvement performance/reliability of the Thameslink service, and the Thameslink Programme Communication. Throughout this period the BCA had regular meetings with her to discuss issues affecting our members. She was honest and frank and we had a great respect for her. Elaine will be a great loss and we wish her well with her new appointment.

11. Bedford Station Quarter proposed Regeneration Scheme

A public meeting was held in Bedford on 26th June where these proposals were outlined. Further work is required by Bedford Borough Council & Halcrow (their Consultants) before a viable scheme can be progressed & a planning application submitted. Network Rail have to firm up the requirements for the operational station, including the Thameslink Programme, East-West Rail & possible MML electrification.

12. East West Rail Link (EWRL)

A leaflet has been produced by Railfuture in support of its campaign to restore train services between Oxford and Cambridge. Any Member requiring a copy of the leaflet please contact Andrew Long. The BCA urge Members to study the leaflet and support the project.

An important report has been published by Steer Davies Gleave (SDG) on behalf of the East-West Rail Consortium (of local authorities) along the line of route. The report, which studies proposals to link Milton Keynes with Cambridge, can be seen at : <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Ox-Cam/latest-news.php> by clicking on "Central Section".

The SDG report to the Consortium contains three basic routing options :

1. Run north from Bedford via Corby & Manton (Rutland) to join the ECML at Peterborough. A new chord would be required at Manton;
2. Link Bedford with Hitchin – either direct via Chicksands/Shefford; or via Sandy & the ECML.
3. Link Luton with Stevenage. This option would be totally new construction, whereas options 1 & 2 would be over existing/reopened alignments respectively.

The Consortium says there is growing acceptance that the western end of the railway line (from Oxford to Bedford) will be built, so it has turned its attention to the thornier problem of bridging the gap between Bedford, the East Coast Main Line (ECML) & Cambridge. While the western section only requires the upgrading of freight or disused sections of track (Bicester – Claydon – Bletchley), the Cambridge end will require major construction work, because of development on the route of the old line east of Bedford which closed in the 1960s.

Despite the BBRUA preference, it has ruled out a direct route from Bedford to Cambridge via Sandy, because this would require about 20 miles of new track and would be too expensive. The proposed Willington Rowing Lake has also caused a serious impediment along part of this route as is recognised.

A northern route via Kettering, Corby (Manton chord), Stamford and Peterborough was also discounted. Whilst it would have been the cheapest option, at £50 million, it would yield the lowest ticket revenue. It would also not deliver the core east-west rail objectives of providing a strategic orbital rail route (equivalent to the M25 motorway) between East Anglia and central southern England while journey times between Oxford & Cambridge would have remained quicker for passengers choosing to travel via London.

Now it is consulting on the **two** better options left - a £200 million "direct" route from Bedford to Hitchin and Cambridge via Baldock; and a £300 million new construction link via Luton, Luton Airport and Stevenage. Given the population density served, the Luton route not surprisingly shows the highest incremental revenues, but is not a direct route geographically. The BCA favour a route which serves Bedford & then continues on via the former Hitchin railway alignment through Cardington, Southill & Henlow - possibly including a new Chicksands "Parkway" station in central Bedfordshire - on a deviation avoiding Shefford.

Trevor Mason of Hertfordshire County Council, who is chairing the consultation, said the Luton link had the best business case, but he is keeping an open mind, saying "We're trying to get all the options on the table and get views from people on them." (See website address details below). Consultation will be carried out with local authorities & other stakeholders and more detailed plans will be drawn up if a firm favourite from the respective route options emerges. Members are urged to support the Bedford-Hitchin route option and to read SDG's report to the Consortium. The East-West Consortium have put documents on to their website, one covering the central section debate and route options east of Bedford : www.eastwestrail.org/reports/documents/CentralSectionReport-February2009.pdf or visit : www.Railfuture.org/uk/Ox-Cam

Press Release Milton Keynes Partnership. Nov 08: www.miltonkeynespartnership.info/media_centre/press_releases.php?ID=121

13. Rail Issues in Central Bedfordshire

The BCA received an e-mail on 27th April 2009 from James Gleave at the new Central Bedfordshire unitary authority. He indicated that a “Paper” was to be prepared for Central Beds Councillors/Portfolio Holders on “Rail Issues in Central Beds” and requested the BCA’s comments, which has been sent. Should any members wish to comment individually they may do so by contacting :

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Planning & Transport Planner
Central Bedfordshire
Sustainable Communities Directorate,
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14. Midland Main Line (MML) electrification

According to the April 20th edition of the on-line magazine “Railway Herald” Network Rail is expecting a decision from Government this summer on MML electrification. Network Rail confidently expects a positive decision. Rail chiefs have been keen to favourably compare Britain’s growing rail industry with systems abroad and with other transport modes. Prospects for rail look good, especially given the high cost of the recent M1 motorway widening at its southern end.

As part of the Thameslink Programme, Network Rail is starting to build the south-east of England into a 12-car operation. It makes sense for electrification on key routes to follow, given the very large volumes of passengers (& freight) being moved. Demand is huge. No other industry faces such relentless growth. The electrification news comes as Network Rail draws up plans to deliver the new railway during Control Period 4 (CP4). Meanwhile construction & project engineers are keen to join what is being described as “Britain’s premier recession-busting industry”.

If electrification of the MML is given approval, passengers have much to look forward to – with the Thameslink Programme, Crossrail & MML improvements all taking place in quick succession!

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For more information, see our website - www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk

If there’s something you want to tell us about, please email admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

This newsletter is published by Bedford Commuters Association.