



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2009 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the March Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters Association.

1. BCA 2009 AGM

A note for your diary. The BCA AGM will be held on Tuesday 12th May 2009 at Dom Polski Club (next to Bedford Station) commencing at 19.30. Representatives from FCC and EMT have been invited.

2. East Midlands Trains (EMT).

The December 2008 timetable change has been very poorly received at Bedford, especially the weekday evening peak returning services from London St. Pancras International to Bedford. Commuter services are crucial, but this point seems lost on EMT who are indifferent to Bedford's needs, believing that FCC are the main service provider, although their trains take longer & call at more intermediate stations. They also fail to realise that passengers wish to travel north of Bedford – indeed the M1 motorway goes from Brent Cross past Junction 13 & on to Leeds!

The BCA are particularly unhappy with the treatment that Bedford has received in the new EMT timetable & consequently have continued to press the case for a comprehensive service review - 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.

At a recent meeting with MPs, including Alistair Burt, Tim Shoveller (MD EMT said it was EMT's job to provide longer distance train services and the responsibility of transporting commuters to/from Bedford fell to First Capital Connect and the Thameslink line. The BCA are very concerned by this comment. It is the responsibility of both TOCs to offer train services at Bedford. In any event, only EMT train services are available to passengers travelling north of Bedford! To add insult to injury, the frequency of trains to/from Leicester has been reduced by 50% and fares increased by 11% - 12%.

The BCA are fully aware that at present FCC are in no position to carry additional passengers in the London direction, due to the lack of rolling stock. Nor is it the sole responsibility of FCC to transport commuters to/from Bedford. The BCA have repeatedly told EMT that many Bedford passengers prefer the faster journey time offered by EMT to/from London St. Pancras, a fact they seem totally oblivious towards. However with the knowledge of our meetings with EMT over many months to try & secure vital changes to the December 2008 timetable, EMT have repeatedly shown their true intentions towards Bedford; ie. to stop as few as possible of their trains at Bedford!

The BCA along with our local MPs will continue to fight for better train services from EMT.

Please note that the EMT off peak timetable is now as follows:

- Every 30 minutes from Bedford to/from St Pancras International (at 00.48 & 00.18 regular interval, with minor differences of a minute or two throughout the day – passengers please check actual departure times);
- Every hour from Bedford to/from Nottingham (at 00.07 regular interval northbound). Please note that although the new East Midlands Parkway station opened on the 26th January 2009, these semi-fast trains from Bedford to Nottingham (and return) do **not** call there;
- Every hour from Bedford to/from Kettering (at 00.38 regular interval). Please note that there are **no** connections available at Kettering northbound to Market Harborough & Leicester (or other stations further north) off these trains. Most of these Bedford trains to Kettering are eventually destined to carry on to Corby. The new station opened there on the 23rd February, but initially only a token Corby train service operates. The full Corby service is unlikely until the May timetable change. Corby reopened on 23rd February with only one up and one down

“taster” service to start with each day – these Mon–Fri services are the 06.03 from Melton Mowbray, Corby 06.37 (07.13 from Bedford) and 18.00 return working from St. Pancras to Corby & Melton Mowbray (Bedford arrive 18.38). On Saturdays, the trains run from Corby to London at 09.15 & return from there at 17.00.

One of the Hull Trains “Pioneers” transferred to EMT should have entered service on 23rd February, hence the *partial* opening of Corby. However, the 18.00 service from St. Pancras will not become a 9/10 car train until at least mid March when the second Pioneer should become available. EMT are currently looking at the overcrowding issues on the 16.30 departure and are hopeful that they can also increase this service to a 10 car train.

The Pioneers are currently having their control software updated (train management system, door operation & other on-board equipment) to allow them to work with the existing EMT Meridian train fleet. They will be repainted into EMT livery. The interior décor will not be changed before entry into service with EMT but the company has confirmed that the sets will be the first to enter the Meridian refurbishment programme once it begins.

EMT remains committed to providing a full & regular direct service for Corby and this will be able to begin when the additional three Pioneer trains required have been secured. Contract negotiations are ongoing. Providing a rail service for Corby was an optional feature of the EMT franchise and to deliver the full service it requires three additional trains. As is known, there is a national shortage of suitable rolling stock and for the last year EMT has been working with the DfT to secure the necessary trains to begin a full service. The introduction of the Corby service has effectively cost Bedford passengers their second train an hour to/from Leicester!

Overcrowding on EMT evening peak services

It has come to our notice that the 16.30, 18.00 and 18.30 EMT services from St Pancras are severely overcrowded. The BCA has been in contact with EMT to express our total dissatisfaction with this situation. We have been told that the 18.00 is currently a 7 car Meridian (despite being assured by EMT that it would be a 10 car Meridian), also the 16.30 is often short formed of 5 cars instead of 10. We have reminded EMT that the BCA categorically informed them that this situation would occur on the 18.00 departure if the Bedford stop was removed from the 17.30 service (as indeed it was in the December 2008 timetable change).

The BCA has therefore suggested that the Luton stop be taken off the 18.00 and put on the 17.55 thus hopefully freeing up some much-needed capacity. We have now been told by EMT that as a result of the Pioneers being transferred to EMT from Hull Trains, they hope to provide a 9/10 car train on the 18.00 during March. Also they are at present looking into the problem on the 16.30. We will continue to monitor the situation and press EMT on this issue if required. We will keep you informed of progress in future newsletters.

17.30 EMT departure from St Pancras

The BCA continue to press EMT to re-introduce the Bedford stop on the 17.30 from St Pancras International and the half hourly service frequency to/from Bedford to Leicester and the North. The BCA understand that Patrick Hall MP has requested a meeting with Lord (Andrew) Adonis the Rail Minister. He has advised the BCA that he wishes to raise the following vital issues with the Minister :

- The DfT limitation on Bedford stops in peak EMT train services
- The Thameslink Programme
- The appalling service reliability on the Bedford – Bletchley/Marston Vale Line
- The status of East-West Rail (EWRL) serving Bedford

Changes to Stagecoach Rail.

It was announced on the 20th February that Stagecoach Chief Executive Brian Souter will directly oversee the management of the group’s South West Trains (SWT) franchise after Ian Dobbs, Chief Executive of Stagecoach UK Rail, was made redundant. Dobbs has spent three and a half years in the post since arriving from Australia. However, a review of costs across Stagecoach’s rail business in response to the current economic downturn has led the group to part with his services.

Stagecoach has already announced 660 redundancies across the South West Trains franchise and speculation is rife that a similar exercise will apply to East Midlands Trains, a Stagecoach sister rail company. It was also announced that Martin Griffiths, the Finance Director of Stagecoach’s main Board of Directors, will now be principal reporting contact for Tim Shoveller, the MD of EMT.

3. Marston Vale Line and Bedford connections.

EMT services north of Bedford have been drastically curtailed since the introduction of the December 2008 timetable. The reliable, half-hourly interval service north to Leicester, Derby and the less regular through trains to/from Sheffield have now all gone. Instead as mentioned above, Bedford only has an hourly service at 00.07 minutes past most hours to Leicester & Nottingham.

This means that EMT connections into & out of Marston Vale Line services at Bedford are now less satisfactory. This is to be deplored and the BCA & BBRUA are working together to ensure that EMT correct their errors in a future timetable revision. Connections available at Leicester to/from Arriva Cross Country services have also deteriorated.

4. FCC Car Park charges

FCC made changes to their car parking tariffs from February 2nd. They maintain that they offer value for money and remain competitively priced in the local market.

Peak tariff at Bedford & Flitwick is now :				
Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annual
£6.50	£30.00	£110.00	£315.00	£1,100.00

Off-peak tariffs are as follows :			
Off peak after 10.00am	Bank Holidays & Weekends	Off-peak after 5.00pm	
£3	£2.00	£2.00	

Many of you drive to the station to catch your train. FCC offer car parking at more than 40 of their stations. All their car parks are managed by NCP (National Car Parks), and together they aim to make it easy for you to pay for your car parking. They offer several ways to pay including a new car park season ticket website and 'park and pay by phone'.

5. FCC Ticket Office Opening Hours

The BCA has responded to Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch on the recent FCC Ticket Office Opening Hours Consultation. The BCA will not agree to any cutting of the present opening hours. Automatic Ticket Machines (ATMs) do not give out the full range of available tickets so some customers could end up paying a higher fare. Also Ticket Office staff provide an invaluable personal service to customers offering advice on tickets, timetable information, connections, etc which a machine cannot do. The present opening hours and proposed opening hours are as follows :

Bedford	Mon – Fri	Saturday	Sunday
Current	05.45 to 00.00	05.45 to 21.45	07.00 to 21.45
Proposed	05.45 to 21.00	05.45 to 20.30	07.15 to 21.15

Flitwick	Mon – Fri	Saturday	Sunday
Current	06.00 to 19.50	06.00 to 15.55	08.15 to 15.40
Proposed	06.00 to 19.30	07.15 to 15.30	08.15 to 15.45

6. First Capital Connect (FCC) – Cauldwell Walk Depot extension & other improvements

FCC has completed work on a £2.2m expansion of their depot at Bedford. The facility at Cauldwell Walk has been extended to make room for the new fleet of Class 377 Electrostar trains due to enter service shortly (see next news item).

The opening of the extended depot took place on the 14th January and now incorporates a fifth covered section of track with inspection pits and elevated platforms from which the new (& existing Class 319) trains can be maintained. When built originally the depot was designed to maintain up to 172 vehicles, but when all the Class 377/5s are delivered there will be 436 carriages.

The depot extension enables FCC to stable and maintain a **new fleet of air-conditioned trains** that will boost capacity and introduce new levels of comfort to the Bedford to Brighton Thameslink route. The first Class 377/5 Electrostar trains are due to enter service early this year. By the time all 92 carriages (23 x 4-car units) arrive later in 2009, all but six rush hour trains will be the maximum eight-carriages long. Today, 25 peak hour services have four carriages. However, a word of warning – only a limited number of the brand new trains are expected to have been delivered by the timetable change date of the 22nd March. Much depends on the delivery of completed Class 377/5 sets from Bombardier (see next item below)! It is likely that some Southern Class 377/2s may be used in the interim.

■ FCC have installed new information screens at **Bedford, Flitwick, Harlington, Harpenden, Leagrave** and **St Albans** stations.

■ At **Harlington** and **Flitwick**, the toilet pods are now back in use.

7. FCC March 2009 Timetable : FCC Statement About Key Output 0.

The BCA recently requested First Capital Connect to provide a statement on the introduction of the Key Output 0 timetable on the 22nd March.

Everyone will be aware that there have been some media reports regarding late delivery of new rolling stock from Bombardier, in particular the 23 new Class 377/5 four car Electrostars.

As you know, additional trains are needed to implement the Key Output 0 timetable, to be introduced to coincide with the closure of the line between Farringdon and Moorgate and the closure of the bay platforms at Blackfriars. In addition to the 23 new trains from Bombardier, the remaining four Class 319 trains still being used by Southern are also scheduled to join FCC's fleet.

Bombardier's deliveries are indeed running late. They attribute this to several of their major suppliers having cash flow problems, which has caused serious delays in the flow of components. By early March only one of the 23 new trains has been delivered and the initial test mileage is being accumulated before the train can go into public service.

First Capital Connect is working closely with the DfT and other industry colleagues to ensure that a robust rolling stock contingency plan is in place to launch the Key Output 0 timetable, should there not be sufficient new units by the target launch date. It now appears that an elaborate shuffle around of stock operated by various South East TOCs will resolve the problem on the short term. Interested members are referred to the 9th March edition of "Rail Manager"
<http://91.186.0.3/~keepingt/rm/>

FCC have stated that safety is their first priority and they are also determined to ensure that their customers do not experience significant deterioration in the quality of service when the new Key Output 0 timetable is implemented. This no doubt refers to the possible likelihood of short-formed trains and consequent over-crowding. Elaine Holt (MD of FCC) has promised to keep the BCA informed of progress.

It had been FCC's intention for a new timetable to commence on March 22nd. A consequence of this is that Moorgate and Barbican stations will close as well as the bay platforms at Blackfriars. Times of trains both in the Morning and Evening peaks will be the same as now. The only alterations will be the destinations of the trains as Moorgate has closed. Trains will now go to various places south of the river such as Sevenoaks, Elephant & Castle, and Beckenham instead of Moorgate.

There are a number of things that need to happen by the 22nd March. They are:

- Additional trains
- A new two-legged footbridge, platform canopies & another set of interchange steps at Farringdon;
- A new station access point at Blackfriars

8. Bedford Station Quarter proposed Regeneration Scheme

A further revised set of proposals has been developed by Halcrow in late January/early February to accommodate late changes by Network Rail. Halcrow need to undertake further work prior to a wider public consultation, probably in March or April. It is assumed that a Planning Application will then go forward to Bedford Borough Council/new unitary authority.

9. East West Rail Link (EWRL)

The Consultancy team at Steer Davies Gleave (SDG) behind plans to reinstate the rail line between Cambridge and Oxford have revealed some possible routes in a recent report to the EWRL Consortium.

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 & Cambridge.

While the western section only requires the upgrading of freight or disused sections of track, 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.

Consultants SDG for the Consortium - which represents more than 30 local authorities - considered four different options for a study published in February. It remains to be seen if any of the proposed routes would be financially viable.

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.

A northern route via Kettering, Corby (Manton chord), Stamford and Peterborough was also discounted. It would have been the cheapest option, at £50 million, but would yield the lowest ticket revenue. However, a service on this route would not deliver the core east-west rail objectives of providing a strategic orbital rail route (equivalent to the M25) 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 the east coast main line/Cambridge; and a £300 million 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. Both the BCA (& the BBRUA) favour a route which serves Bedford & then continues on via the former Hitchin railway alignment through Cardington, Southill & Henlow - possibly including a Chicksands "Parkway" station in central Bedfordshire on a deviation avoiding Shefford.

The Consortium hopes both options would cut the rail journey time between Oxford and Cambridge

from two and a half hours to approximately one hour and 45 minutes.

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. He said: "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 emerges. We urge Members to support the Bedford-Hitchin route option and to read SDG's report to the Consortium.

However, the Consortium says there are many more hurdles to overcome before it gets close to starting construction and this might in any event require a Transport & Works Act (TWA) application for any re-use of old track-beds or indeed new construction on revised alignments. 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

An example of cost comparison/value for money is the A421 improvement from Bedford to Junction 13 of the M1 at Brogborough. This road will become dual carriageway across its whole length & will join the M1 through an improved Junction 13. The scheme is due to cost £230m, for expected completion by the end of 2010. Compare this with the £200m for a EWRL rail route east of Bedford! Perhaps the DfT will fund the EWRL rail route in the same manner they have funded the Highways Agency trunk road scheme. A cost per mile estimate for both is quite revealing!

10. Thameslink Programme – Fleet Renewal.

On the DfT's website there is now a new document (under their rail section) regarding the technical specification for the new Thameslink Programme rolling stock. Members may wish to comment back to the DfT regarding this, especially regarding the section around page 20 regarding station dwell times. Proposals also include automatic current change from third rail & overhead wire & vice versa.

The four shortlisted bidders (manufacturers Alstom, Bombardier, Hitachi and Siemens),

will make their final submissions in April 2009 to a challenging brief. They have to supply detailed proposals for about 1270 carriages that can carry many more people and, at the same time, ensure those people can get on and off the train quickly enough to allow up to 24 trains per hour through central London by the end of 2015 – that's a train every two to three minutes. It's making a mainline train run at metro-style intervals! Features specified include:

- Longer trains with greater capacity (12-car & 8-car formations proposed)
- More spacious interiors and wide/open connections between carriages
- Lighter, energy-efficient vehicles that cause less wear to the track – possibly with articulation & low track force bogies
- Greater reliability
- Faster acceleration and (regenerative) braking
- Advances in safety and reliability built in
- Intelligent use of new technology:
- Passenger information systems fed with real-time travel information to update passengers on their connections and to guide overseas visitors arriving through the airports (Luton & Gatwick) and Eurostar services;
- Passenger loading information transmitted to central London platforms to advise people where to stand so they can board the train where there is most space;
- Air-conditioning that automatically adjusts according to the number of people in each carriage;
- Features for passengers with luggage and people of restricted mobility;

The BCA urge members to respond to the consultation as the new trains will be in service for many years to come. Bids will be formally submitted in April 2009 with the contract being awarded in March 2010. Most if not all trains on the Thameslink route(s) will be brand new & built to new specifications by the end of 2015. It is intended that the new build of trains will be 8 & 12-car formations, with 2 + 2 seating, wide vestibules and clear areas around the doors. The internal configuration may differ slightly depending on whether trains are "Metro" or "Outer".

The Thameslink Programme will deliver longer trains and a higher frequency during the morning & evening peaks, longer platforms, improved station facilities and more destinations by 2015.

Latest indications are that the new train build will comprise 1,270 vehicles with delivery scheduled between 2012 & the end of 2015 - hopefully for the new timetable to be introduced in December 2015.

11. London Orbital Railway gets the green light

On the 12th February approval was given for the completion of the second phase of the East London Line (London Overground) extension. This means that it will be completed before the 2012 Games. The scheme will link Surrey Quays to Clapham Junction, providing direct links to the City & Docklands.

The work will complete the London Overground network and create an orbital railway around the capital utilising the West London, North London, East London & South London Lines, reducing congestion on radial routes and at central London interchange stations. The extension will provide four trains an hour in each direction between Dalston Junction and Clapham Junction.

FCC passengers using West Hampstead Thameslink station will be able to interchange there (via West End Lane) to the West Hampstead London Overground station for services around the London Orbital route. Work has recently commenced on station & access improvements at West Hampstead Thameslink – part of the Thameslink Programme works & acceptance of the station's importance as an interchange with the London Overground & Jubilee Lines.

12. Updates.

Useful websites to receive regular updates :
www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/changes (for up to date timetable & other service changes);
www.thameslinkprogramme.co.uk (for the latest news on infrastructure work in connection with the Thameslink Programme).

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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

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