



# BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

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## DECEMBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the December Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters' Association. The Chairman and Committee of the BCA wish you Season's Greetings.

### 1. Adverse Weather and the Delay-Repay Scheme

As most of you have been only too aware, unusually early spells of snow and ice have hit the country in the last couple of weeks and transport in and out of London has been badly affected. The London to Brighton main line was impassable for nearly two days and FCC were reduced to an emergency timetable between Bedford and St.Pancras with no trains through the central core or the Wimbledon Loop.



Photo: Alex Dasi-Sutton

FCC have advised us that applications for the Delay-Repay Scheme will be considered as usual and suggest that, in calculating whether you have been delayed sufficiently to claim, ie over 30 mins, you should use a basis the normal service you would have used had it not been for the imposition of the emergency timetable.

### 2. December Timetable Changes

EMT - there are no changes to the timetable that affect Bedford  
FCC – there are only minimal changes to the timetable

Christmas and New Year Services:-

The BCA understand that FCC services over this period are as follows:

- 24<sup>th</sup> December** – usual early closure
- 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> December** – no service
- 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> December** – weekend services terminating at St Pancras Intl
- 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> December** – augmented weekend service terminating at St Pancras Intl
- 31<sup>st</sup> December** – augmented weekend service operating through the core route
- 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> January** – weekend service operating through the core route

### 3. Government October Spending Review - Thameslink Investment announcement

The Government presented its spending review to Parliament on 20 October and DFT has released further details about its effect on Transport. An announcement about the Thameslink Programme was made by Philip Hammond, the Secretary of State for Transport, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, confirming that the full scheme will be funded, including new trains, but, refurbishment work at London Bridge station is being restructured as the original plan was "ambitious", and will take two years longer (from 2016 to 2018).



Network Rail said its 2016 target for completing the work was "always ambitious in terms of the time-scale". Its spokesman said: "The redevelopment of London Bridge station is a major undertaking and will involve significant alterations to the tracks, station platforms and the concourse. "However, the new timescales announced today by the government means we can carry out the work in a way which is less disruptive to passengers, as well as seek further efficiencies in design and delivery of the work."

The BCA is delighted at this announcement although pressure group London TravelWatch (LTW) has expressed concern at this delay. The project will add "much-needed capacity" but the announcement of a delay means more overcrowding, LTW said. Jo deBank, of LTW said: "We are very pleased that Thameslink is going ahead in its entirety, providing much-needed capacity for inner London and the surrounding commuter regions. "However, we are disappointed that passengers will have to endure severe disruption for a further three years, especially at a time when passengers are suffering huge fare rises. "This delay means it is not so much jam tomorrow, as jam the day after tomorrow." Baroness Jo Valentine, Chief Executive of London First (which represents major London firms), said the go-ahead for Thameslink will send an "important signal that London can cater for growth by renewing and expanding its critical transport infrastructure".

The DfT has stated that it is currently considering bids to build the brand new Thameslink fleet of trains from two consortia led by Siemens and Bombardier. An announcement about the choice of preferred bidder will be made in the Spring of 2011. However, First Capital Connect has said a limited number of 12-carriage trains will run from December 2011, largely comprised of the existing Class 377/5 trains (with perhaps some further Class 377s borrowed from Southern).

Once completed in 2018, the capacity on the Thameslink route (including GN services to Cambridge & Peterborough) will be doubled in terms of both carriages and frequency. Up to 1,200 new carriages will be added to the north-south Thameslink routes and passengers will see 24 trains an hour on the core section through central London. Transport Secretary Philip Hammond approved the Thameslink project as part of a wider £8bn investment in the UK rail network. His announcement has however caused disappointment in the East Midlands, where there had been hopes that the Midland Main Line would be electrified between Bedford and Sheffield.

Now, a "triple-whammy" for commuters' pockets:

#### 4. January Fares Rise

Under current legislation the formula for the average regulated fares increase for January 2011 is the July 2010 RPI figure (4.8%) +1%, ie 5.8%. Other specific fares may be raised by a further 5% (with corresponding lower increases elsewhere). The Association of Train Operating Companies ("ATOC") have welcomed a decision by the DfT to restore a limited "flex" when TOCs calculate their fare rises in January 2011. This will see some fares rise more quickly than others. Although ATOC has announced that national rail fares will rise on average by 6.2%, FCC's fares from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 will rise by an average of **5.5%**.

FCC has advised the BCA that they would like to assure passengers that they have sought to keep price rises to a minimum, reminding us that, for most tickets, these are the first price rises for two years. FCC have said that they would like to encourage continued growth in rail travel and have set their prices accordingly. They also confirm to passengers that they can buy tickets for trains and car parks for the year ahead at existing prices until the **end** of December 2010.

***More disturbing for passengers is that the Government has announced that regulated fares will rise by RPI + 3% from January 2012. Although passengers may blame the TOCs, criticism should rightly be directed towards the DfT & the Treasury.***

The increases are part of the plan by Government to shift more of the burden of railway costs to the fare payer. Currently, costs are shared by the taxpayer and the fare payer - the long-term objective is for fare payers to meet 75% of the cost. Whilst unpalatable & painful, inflation-busting rises do help to safeguard railway investment. Without them, the Government would be likely to decide it couldn't afford capacity increases such as the Thameslink Programme. ATOC, which supplied the figures, said the above-inflation rises were a response to recent Government policy changes, which meant passengers having to pay more towards railway investment. Michael Roberts, Chief Executive of ATOC, said:

"We know times are tough for many people but next year's fare increases will ensure that Britain can continue investing in its railways. Even with

these fare increases, the money passengers spend on fares covers only half the cost of running the railways - taxpayers make up the difference. The government is sticking with the previous administration's policy to cut the taxpayers' contribution to the overall cost of running the railways. Money invested through fares has helped to bring about the record levels of customer satisfaction and punctuality on the railways today."

Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT) campaigner Alexandra Woodsworth said the rises made a mockery of the government's commitment to fair pricing for rail travel, adding:

"Increasing rail fares is not smart, not fair and not green. It's high time that the government started keeping some of its promises."

Ashwin Kumar, Director of Passenger Focus, said "Passengers deserve to know how much of the burden they will have to bear in January." The group said by lumping together regulated and unregulated fares, ATOC was potentially concealing an average rise of nearly 7% in unregulated fares.

Gerry Doherty, leader of the TSSA rail union, said the rise was "simply outrageous" and the Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT) warned the rises would price people off trains. Passenger groups expressed disappointment that ATOC had not provided figures for individual train companies

It may help members to understand where the fare revenue actually goes. The breakdown by each £ spent is understood to be: -

- 48p goes to Network Rail, which charges operators to access tracks and other infrastructure costs (track access charges, station leases, etc.)
- 17p on staff costs
- 17p on miscellaneous costs including train maintenance, administration, contractors
- 11p on leasing trains from ROSCOs (Rolling stock leasing companies)
- 4p on fuel/energy
- 3p to train company profit (FCC>First Group; EMT>Stagecoach)

Whilst unwelcome, the real pricing has to be placed in the context of investment, growing demand and increasing industry costs (wages, fuel/electricity, VAT, etc). Although rail travel has dipped slightly during the recession, as the

economy recovers, passenger journeys have risen 10% over the past year. Demand is expected to double over the coming decade. Both FCC & EMT report passenger & revenue growth.

## 5. Car Parking

From November 1<sup>st</sup> the cost of parking your car at Flitwick station during the peak has been reduced to £5.50 per day. Members will be interested to note, that station car park tariffs will increase in January by an average of 8.5%, which includes Bedford - but not Flitwick; this figure includes a 2.5% increase in VAT from January. The Flitwick situation is pleasing, because FCC have informed us that they will "hold" the price after the November reduction, despite the VAT increase in January 2011. Off-peak parking charges remain the same at both stations.

FCC's investment in improved facilities and security will continue, although the BCA has pointed out the number of lights not working in Bedford's station car park (which has now been rectified).

FCC report a 50% fall in crime at all their car parks in the last year.

## 6. Fares Increase to Moorgate/Barbican

The BCA met with Richard Fuller MP and Nadine Dorries MP at Portcullis House, Westminster on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2010. At this meeting concern was raised about the fares increase to Moorgate and Barbican as a result of the DfT ceasing to subsidise the 'underground element' between Farringdon and Moorgate from March 2011 (the FCC "Thameslink" line having closed in March 2009). As a result of this the Chairman wrote to both MPs. Consequently Richard Fuller tabled a question to the Transport Minister as follows:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will continue his departments' subsidy for Thameslink users who are required to use Transport for London services to reach Moorgate station"

Theresa Villiers, Minister of State (Rail & Aviation) Transport, replied:

"Following the closure of the Farringdon to Moorgate branch on 22 March 2009 as part of the Thameslink Programme, through fares to

Moorgate were protected for 2 years from this date. This commitment therefore ends on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011”

The BCA has yet to receive any reply from the MPs, but the Government’s policy obviously remains.

Other issues discussed with the MPs included our concerns over the Spending Review and its possible effect on the Thameslink Programme especially the new Rolling Stock. Both MPs are now fully conversant with our concerns. The BCA found this to be a very useful meeting in ensuring that the MPs were briefed fully on matters concerning our members.

## 7. Meeting with FCC

The BCA met with FCC Managers including Neal Lawson MD FCC on 30<sup>th</sup> September. We discussed several issues as follows:

1. Fleet Reliability – we have been assured that all the class 319’s will have had a complete health check before this winter. This has included checking all heating elements and changing those which were faulty, completing all outstanding modifications plus a complete check on all the doors. Reliability figures are 12,800 miles per casualty for class 319 and 29,000 miles per casualty for class 377.
2. Graffiti – many class 319 units have suffered graffiti damage when being stabled overnight at depots south of the river. FCC outlined how they are combating this problem which we felt very reassured about that all that was possible was being done.
3. Customer Information Screens – all Thameslink stations have now been completed and post operational snags are now being collated and dealt with. Please report any problems you notice to FCC or BCA committee, thus ensuring that the CIS work correctly.
4. Driver Training – the latest update was that 33 drivers were still in training and all will be passed out progressively to May 2011. (please remember it takes 12 months to fully train a driver).
5. Contingency Planning – FCC are developing a Key Route Strategy and closely looking at ‘junctions’ to ensure the best available service is provided. This is an ongoing programme.
6. Disruption Management – a programme of making available Blackberry terminals to staff to keep them fully informed with the latest up

to date service information is now complete . If any member has any problems with a lack of information during times of disruption please contact the BCA committee with details so that we can raise the problem with FCC.

7. Performance – the latest figures were discussed at it would seem that performance is generally good with more room for improvement. We raised the issue of late platform changes at Flitwick. FCC will look at this and report back.

8. Thameslink Programme – an update was given. The programme is on time with the next major work taking place at Blackfriars (refer to our September Newsletter for details of work involved) between November 20 and January 16 when Blackfriars station will be closed although trains will run through, but **not** stop. See later item on Blackfriars closure.

## 8. East West Rail Link. Progress Report – November 2010

### 1. Meeting with Rail Minister and inclusion in HLOS

1.1. Following the completion of the GRIP 4 design and business case work in July 2010, the East West Rail Consortium is progressing with some refinement of the railway infrastructure design to reflect current strategic thinking emerging from the Department for Transport. Primarily this involves assessing the impact of introducing a twin track railway from Oxford to Bedford, as opposed to certain elements of the line remaining single track as shown in the GRIP 4 Outline Business Case.

1.2. This additional work is expected to be completed by December this year after which there will be a completed design and outline business case ready for submission to the Department for Transport’s High Level Output Specification (HLOS) programme for 2014-2019.

1.3. Following a meeting with the Rail Minister, the Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP, Iain Stewart MP, Mark Lancaster MP and Neil Gibson, Chairman of the East West Rail Consortium on 3 November 2010, the Department has agreed that the East West Rail (Western section) should be assessed for inclusion in the next HLOS. This is extremely encouraging and provides added credibility for the scheme’s deliverability. It is a significant achievement for the Consortium.

1.4. The Consortium will shortly be pursuing a strategy of establishing joint working with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) with the intention of them submitting bids for Regional Growth Funding. The Oxfordshire and South East Midlands LEPs are already established. Contact with Thames Valley Berkshire LEP is

planned, whilst the Thames Valley Buckinghamshire LEP is awaiting approval.

1.5. Now that the Consortium has approval to submit the project into HLOS, it is essential the Consortium makes more progress on private sector funding. To this end consideration is being given to holding a workshop with all relevant Local Planning Authorities with the objective of establishing common ground. The BCA trust that both Bedford Borough & Central Bedfordshire will ensure attendance at this workshop and that both local authorities include support for EWRL in their LDF & LTP 3 documents.

## 2. Chiltern Railways Evergreen 3

2.1. The East West Rail Consortium provided two witnesses (Neil Gibson, Chairman of the Consortium and Patrick O'Sullivan, Project Manager) on the first day of the Public Inquiry into Chiltern Railways' application for a Transport and Works Act (TWA) Order for their Evergreen 3 project on 2nd November 2010.

2.2. The Public Inquiry is expected to continue throughout the rest of this year and into January 2011. A decision by the Secretary of State for Transport can be expected towards the third quarter of 2011. If this is favourable, it will reflect well on the East West Rail (Western section), as the Inspector will have been persuaded that there are grounds for the western section to be funded and delivered within the timeframe to 2017.

Those members who are interested can obtain more information about the East West Rail project by visiting the East West Rail Consortium website at: [www.eastwestrail.org](http://www.eastwestrail.org)  
Tel: 01908 353752 / 01296 382964 or Email: [media@eastwestrail.org.uk](mailto:media@eastwestrail.org.uk)

## 9. EMT Meridians

Several Bedford members have commented on the poor internal state of EMT's Meridians. EMT are currently experiencing some toilet issues with the Meridian fleet, which they are working closely with Bombardier, the train builders, to resolve. Riding fitters travel on many services and these faults get reported. EMT have also admitted that they don't get every train fully cleaned at St Pancras. Turn round times are very tight because of only four platforms and the additional extended service to Sheffield. Quite often the cleaners only get part way through the train, starting in first class and working through standard. They also have to tank with water the galleys and toilets and this is very time consuming.

EMT are currently undertaking a time and motion study with a view to improving the standards, looking at on board cleaning teams

and turn-round cleaning at Sheffield, to try and improve the presentation of trains.

This perhaps illustrates the way these trains are timetabled & diagrammed, leaving little slack in their schedules for even routine cleaning & train presentation work to be carried out!

## 10. Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration proposals.

The BCA ensured that its representatives attended the recent exhibition at the Harpur Suite on 3rd and 4th of November 2010. This exhibition covered the Station Quarter, other Bedford town centre redevelopment proposals and the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP 3).

The BCA has a spokesman on the Bedford Station Quarter Working Party. We have responded to Bedford Borough in respect of the Council's latest proposals, and have asked the following questions:

- Has the Station Quarter South been included by the Council in its bid to the Local Enterprise Partnership (South East Midlands LEP)?
- The Station Travel Plan was not mentioned: when and how will it be launched?
- Have the proposals taken into account the developing plans for the East/West Rail Link, and the provision of 12 car carriage sidings south of the Ouse Bridge/Kempston Road?

Bedford Borough's LTP 3 covers the period 2011-2021. The LTP is a statutory document which has to be produced under the Transport Act 2008. It has to be set out in two parts – the strategy document which sets out the Council's transport priorities – and the delivery plan which shows how it intends to achieve them. The LTP should fit with the Local Development Framework (LDF) which allocates how land is to be used over the same time-span.

Bedford Borough will review the comments & views from the consultation and finalise the details of the strategy documents together with an implementation plan. The completed LTP should be available in April 2011.

If members have any suggestions or queries, more information can be obtained at : [www.bedford.gov.uk/transportviews](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/transportviews) or email : [LTP@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:LTP@bedford.gov.uk)

## 11. Bedford Station rebuild

Network Rail have now indicated that any rebuild of Bedford station will not now take place until Control Period 5 (CP5). The eventual rebuild may not be part of the Thameslink Programme scheme of work, but dealt with separately. In this respect the BCA & BBRUA are more comfortable, because both would argue that any future rebuild of Bedford station should take account of MML, Marston Vale and East-West train services, rather than just Thameslink ones. Given the revised completion date for delivery of the full Thameslink Programme scheme, the delay to the Bedford station rebuild gives a breathing-space for a more comprehensive & well thought out station rebuild to be brought forward.

12-car carriage sidings for the new trains are now likely to be adjacent to the Marston Vale railway line south of the Kempston Road bridge and preliminary work has recently started on the platform lengthening at Bedford for 12-car train operation.

### 12. Central Beds LTP 3

The BCA were represented at the stakeholder consultation workshop held in Biggleswade on the 8 September. FCC had hoped to be present at the second workshop at Dunstable on the 15 September, but this was cancelled.

The Biggleswade meeting was chaired by Paul Cook, Head of Transport Strategy at Central Beds Council, but no Portfolio Holder or Director/Assistant Director was present. If members have any suggestions or queries, more information can be obtained at : [www.letstalkcentral.com/transport](http://www.letstalkcentral.com/transport) Central Beds can be e-mailed on : [paul.cook@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.cook@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) & [myjourney@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:myjourney@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

Progress has not been as productive with Central Beds as it has with Bedford Borough, which is very disappointing for the BCA. No liaison meeting has been held since 3 March 2009 (which was with the former Mid Beds DC) and Central Beds have not engaged in a positive or meaningful way towards rail users. However, the BCA will continue to try and encourage Central Beds to engage with us so as to ensure that rail users' voices are rightfully heard along with those other public transport users. Sadly Central Beds actions are contrary to the "best practice" displayed by other local authorities. It is vital that they do speak to rail users, especially following the Secretary of State for Transport's announcement on 25 November regarding the full completion of the Thameslink Programme.

Station Travel Plans (STPs) are being produced for both Bedford & Leighton Buzzard – it is therefore most unfortunate that Central Beds are unwilling to extend the concept to their other stations on FCC – Thameslink & Great Northern routes. Certainly Flitwick ought to have been a prime candidate for a further STP, along with 'match-funding' to upgrade the railway station, helping to make it DDA compliant and more user-friendly. Better facilities, including improved waiting shelters would be most welcome. By comparison, Hertfordshire County Council signed a "Quality Rail Partnership" on the 11<sup>th</sup> November. Central Beds have a very long way to go before they even approach the standards of their peers in other (adjoining) local authorities!

### 13. Blackfriars Closure

Now that Blackfriars has closed (since 20 November & for eight weeks), these are the various guides that set out alternative travel options:

1. Thameslink Programme website: <http://tinyurl.com/26dfk6v> (PDF file).
2. Buses from City Thameslink: <http://tinyurl.com/bddcpc> (PDF file).
3. Walking directions: <http://tinyurl.com/34jv6ux> (note this offers 'direct', 'less busy' and 'low pollution' walking options).

Recommended walking directions (to/from City Thameslink) are:

**To Blackfriars itself:** Right out of Ludgate Circus entrance, first right into Pageantmaster Court, a left then immediate right into Blackfriars Lane and follow this down to Queen Victoria Street. Blackfriars Station is to the right, on the opposite side.

**To Thames Path east and Bankside:** Right out of Ludgate Hill, walk up to St Paul's Cathedral, then walk past it (keep it on your left) and then turn right and walk towards the Millennium Bridge. Depending on your destination, cross it or go down the steps to the left of it.

At the time of writing, the platforms for the new (eastern) through platforms are being completed and track laid, along with the new canopies. The roof covering will be installed later to provide some amount of protection against the elements. Blackfriars should reopen on 17 January 2011, whilst eventually

there will be station entrances on both sides of the Thames.



Artist's impression, looking south of completed platforms



Poor view from passing train of the new platforms, taken in December 2010



View south of the station in July 2010



What that looked like in July 2010



View of the southern approaches this month, with track laid, ready to be slewed over at Christmas

Once the tracks have been slewed to the new platforms over Christmas and the stations reopens to passengers in January, the western platforms will be removed and the bridge taken down to the rib arches and refurbished, just like the eastern side. Three extra rib arches will be added to every span to accommodate the new bay platforms, whereas only one set (see photo above) was needed on the eastern side.

#### 14. Industrial action on London Underground

Members of the RMT and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) have staged three strikes in recent months over the threat to cut about 800 jobs, with more threatened.

#### **15. Future of London Travelwatch (LTW)**

Members may be aware that LTW is the consumer body which represents rail passengers on the Thameslink route. The London Assembly now plans to abolish LTW and to bring some of its functions into the Assembly itself. The London Assembly plans to allocate responsibility for rail services in London to Passenger Focus. Primary legislation will be required to abolish LTW but details and timing are still to be decided.

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If there's something you want to tell us about, please email [admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk](mailto:admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk)

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