



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

JUNE/JULY 2010 NEWSLETTER

Welcome the June/July edition of the Bedford Commuters Association Newsletter.

I. AGM 2010

The AGM took place on May 17th at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford. There were 15 members, plus the Committee in attendance. As usual, representatives from FCC, EMT and Network Rail were in attendance. The meeting approved the Chairman's Report, Treasurers Report and the new Committee which is as follows: -

Arthur Taylor	Chairman
Jim Allwood	Treasurer
John MacLeod	Membership Secretary
Andrew Long	Press Officer/Newsletter
Mark Spurgeon	
Ben Foley	
John Henderson	

The Secretary post is still vacant and potential volunteers are invited to contact any existing member of the Committee to see what is involved. It was also agreed to move the AGM to October in future years so that it closely follows the end of the financial year. The next AGM will therefore be in October 2011 although there may well be a General Meeting organised this Autumn, to update members on the Thameslink Programme.

Neal Lawson, MD of FCC, gave a presentation on Investment, improved Customer Information, Performance, and Thameslink Programme. This was followed by Gareth Leslie, Route Manager for EMT gave a presentation on Performance, HST/Meridian refurbishment, infrastructure improvements and the May timetable changes. The presentations were concluded with Andrew Parker from Network Rail, who outlined the plans for the new Bedford Station (but see later). The Meeting concluded with a 'Question and Answer' session.

All the above presentations are available on our website.

2. Thameslink Programme Update

As you may be aware the new coalition Government has decided to review the Thameslink Programme and the new trains that will need to be provided to run Greater Thameslink services from 2016. It is expected that this review will be completed by the Autumn. We await the outcome with interest, but will obviously be very concerned if there is any suggestion of delaying or even cancelling the procurement of new trains.

Blackfriars Station – FCC have confirmed that Blackfriars Station will be closed from 20th November 2010 to 16th January 2011 inclusive, to allow new platforms on the east side to be built and the track re-laid to serve these new platforms. During this closure trains will still run through Blackfriars but not stop. Customers should use FCC City Thameslink or Elephant & Castle stations instead.

December 2011 – initial 12 car trains – three four carriage Electrostar Class 377s from Southern will be allocated to FCC, thus allowing up to eight services per day (three southbound and one northbound in the morning and vice versa in the evening) to be 12-car trains. This will be approximately an extra 1,900 seats. It is not yet known which particular services will be lengthened.

Bedford Station – it was announced recently that in order for the Thameslink Programme to deliver best value for money to taxpayers, the plans to rebuild Bedford Station have been put on hold. However, platforms 1 to 3 will still be lengthened so that they can accommodate the 12-car trains that are scheduled to commence running from December 2011. This platform lengthening work is not the subject of a planning application as it is deemed to be “permitted development”.

The BCA had expressed its concern to both Network Rail & Bedford Borough Council about the plans for the new station and we hope that this deferment will give us time to ensure that the plans are amended to take into account our concerns. The Borough Council will be taking no further action on the application, so members are advised not to make any representations in relation to it at this stage.

Network Rail actually submitted their full planning application for the new station building & additional platform, to Bedford Borough Council on the 7th June, Ref. 10/01193/MAF. This application included demolition of the existing railway station (building) and the erection in its place of a two storey building on an adjoining site – with a new connection to the platform footbridge – and amendments to the existing car parking layout. However, the planning application was withdrawn by Network Rail later the same week! This leaves a problem, as an outline planning application (Ref. 10/00701/EIA) had been made on May 6th for the “Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration” (**BSQR**) scheme (see below). This application remains, although it had always been intended that **both** applications were considered together.

3. Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration

This proposal is for a wider redevelopment of sites around the station itself, seeking mixed use development across the station site and adjoining land, to comprise :

- A new station building (1,525m² maximum internal floor space, with retail floor space up to a maximum of 500m²);
- Residential (up to 99 dwellings with an overall maximum floor space of 12,725m²);
- Offices & Hotel (23,915m² maximum floor space);
- Additional retail (1,410m² maximum floor space);
- 3 x multi-storey car parks to serve both the station/offices/hotel (a maximum of 1,086 parking spaces);
- Multi-storey parking to serve the offices (a maximum of 190 spaces); and
- Other associated development and infrastructure.

Basically because the BSQR application includes proposals to demolish the existing railway station building and replace it with a building which is based upon the same development parameters as the withdrawn full planning application by Network Rail, this poses a problem and the potential implications are currently being reviewed by the Borough Council. The BCA will notify members of any changes in the status or content of both the BSQR application & the withdrawn Network Rail planning application in due course. Naturally, should a further application be submitted by Network Rail for their part of the site, members will receive a further notification and again be given an opportunity to comment.

Members may comment on the BSQR proposals until 5th July, by responding to the Planning Department at the Town Hall, Bedford, MK40 1SJ. The Case Officer is Mr. Jim Caffrey, tel. 01234 221735.

4. 17.30 St Pancras to Nottingham EMT service

As we reported in the last Newsletter, EMT reinstated the Bedford stop on the 17.30 from St Pancras. The BCA campaigned hard for this and we were naturally very pleased when it was announced. We would like

members who travel on this service and the 18.00 from St Pancras to let us know how these trains are running especially the 18.00 which in the past was heavily overloaded. Your views will allow us to assess how these trains are working and if necessary ask for a meeting with EMT to discuss any further problems. Please pass any comments to : admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

5. Stagecoach

Stagecoach, owner of East Midlands Trains, and one of Britain's largest public transport groups launched a campaign today to protect buses and trains from swingeing budget cuts by urging the government to economise on investment in roads and motorways.

Stagecoach said bus subsidies and rail fares should not bear the brunt in a looming 25% reduction in the Department for Transport's £15.9bn budget. Instead, it pointed to the £3.7bn spent by the Highways Agency on motorways and trunk roads every year as a more suitable candidate for the chop. The DfT and the Communities and Local Government departments spend around £2.4bn per year on buses, including up to £1bn on pensioners' bus passes and more than £400m on fuel subsidies.

"If I were the transport minister I would certainly cut road-building before I cut concessionary fares. We have big social implications. To take out fuel duty [subsidies] would mean enormous fare increases," said Brian Souter, Stagecoach's Chief Executive.

Arguing against shortening trains to save costs, the Stagecoach founder added that the rail network around London, where the company operates the South West Trains service, was already under strain and needed more investment in rolling stock. Philip Hammond, the Transport Secretary, is bringing forward a cost review of the rail industry and has frozen the order of more than 1,000 carriages for the network.

"I would not touch the fares and I would not short-form trains. In the south of England they will have to do something on train capacity or else there will be health and safety problems," he said. According to the Office of Rail Regulation, the government spends around £5bn per year on the rail network.

Souter spoke as Stagecoach, which co-owns Virgin Trains and operates buses in more than 100 towns and cities across the UK, announced a fall in pre-tax profits for the year to 30 April from £170.8m to £129.8m. However, the bus division remained Stagecoach's strongest performer, reporting a 0.4% increase in operating profit to £126m, while the rail division suffered a 25% slump in operating profit to £41.6m. The group underlined the government's budgetary problems last week when it won a legal battle with the DfT over £100m worth of compensation for an earnings shortfall at South West Trains. The DfT's burgeoning payments to train operators for revenue shortfalls – Virgin received £77m last year – is proving an unexpected drain on the department's finances.

A leading roads and motorist group said Stagecoach's bus operation would undermine its own operations if Souter's call was heeded by ministers. "His buses use roads, of course, and his vehicles would be very much affected by cuts in roads budgets," said Stephen Glaister, director of the RAC Foundation. Motoring groups warn that cuts in road investment would affect millions more journeys than reductions in bus and rail spend, because motor vehicles account for more than eight out of 10 passenger journeys. The DfT has already targeted roads for early cuts by shelving a £1.1bn improvement to the A14 in Suffolk.

A DfT spokesman said: "The scale of the savings required across government means there will clearly be difficult choices to be made. But we are clear that they are absolutely necessary if we are to ensure the long term sustainability of transport investment in this country."

6. Network Rail

Network Rail has been criticised for paying senior management a total of £2.4m in bonuses last year, despite a warning from the Rail Regulator, and criticism by Ministers. Transport Secretary Philip Hammond said he was "very disappointed", and called for a "far-reaching" review of pay. Outgoing Chief Executive Iain

Coucher received a £641,000 bonus on top of his £613,000 salary. The Rail Regulator had warned the government-subsidised infrastructure company about management pay. Earlier this year, the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) demanded "clear evidence" to justify any bonuses paid to company bosses. However, Network Rail chairman Rick Haythornthwaite, defended the payouts, saying the bonuses were "only rewards for success. This is measured against what matters most to passengers - a better railway with more trains on time," he explained.

THE MANAGEMENT AND THEIR PAY				
Name	Role	Bonus	Total Pay (£)	Change vs 2009
Source: Network Rail				
Iain Coucher	Chief Executive	£641,000	£1,447,000	+53%
Patrick Butcher	Finance Director	£199,000	£669,000	NA
Robin Gisby	Operations & Customer Services	£309,000	£735,000	+104%
Peter Henderson	Asset Management	£460,000	£1,041,000	+15%
Simon Kirby	Investment Projects	£331,000	£769,000	+109%
Paul Plummer	Planning & Development	£313,000	£720,000	+104%
Ron Henderson	Retired	£102,000	£128,000	-85%
	13 Non-Exec directors	£0	Total: £646,000 Avg: £50,000	+2%
Total		£2,355,000	£6,155,000	+39%

Transport Secretary Philip Hammond, significantly backed by Prime Minister David Cameron, said the decision was inappropriate in the current times. "Network Rail is of course a private company," he said. "But one that is dependent on taxpayer funding". "In the week when everyone has been asked to share the burden of reducing Britain's deficit, people will rightly be asking how Network Rail's top executives feel this is appropriate." Mr Hammond, who had written to Network Rail urging constraint, called for the upcoming review of the management incentive plan to be "far reaching and fundamental".

The bonus decisions come as Network Rail seeks a successor to Mr Coucher to take over the negotiation of the next funding round. Mr Coucher is set to leave after eight years with the firm, the last three years as Chief Executive. "It is nothing short of a national scandal" said Bob Crow, RMT General Secretary. He expressed outrage at the decision to pay such a large bonus to an outgoing manager.

The ORR, which sets Network Rail's level of public funding, said it was now up to Network Rail to "fully justify how it has reached its decisions". Earlier this year, it criticised parts of the operator's performance, highlighting the death of three railway workers in the past year. In its annual assessment of Network Rail it said: "We consider that the level of our intervention and the pressure we needed to apply went above what should have been required." The ORR also said it was "not yet convinced of the efficiency gains the company is claiming".

Early in June Network Rail announced that its profits had fallen by nearly 75% over the past year but the company said a record number of trains were running on time. Network Rail, which operates the UK's rail infrastructure, made pre-tax profits of £395m (\$572m), down from more than £1.52bn last year. The company receives most of its money from the taxpayer. The fall in profits is due to a revaluation of its assets as well as a drop in revenue from train companies. Part of it reflects higher investment in the network. Its regulator, the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) sets the returns Network Rail is allowed to make and orders reinvestment.

The ORR has described this year's as "mixed" and warned that bonus payments must reflect performance. Last year, payments to its top executives totalled £1.2m despite shortcomings identified by the ORR and provoked strong criticism - although Network Rail's Chief Executive, Iain Coucher, did not take up his own bonus.

Changing priorities - Network Rail's current government funding runs from 2009 to 2014 (known as Control Period 4 or CP4), and although the coalition government is keen to cut public spending it would have to reopen negotiations to do so. Iain Coucher told BBC Radio 4's Today programme he was ready to talk to the government again if need be. He said: "We will certainly talk to the government about their priorities if they have changed." But he added that he was not expecting any change to his budget.

Another source of income comes from the fees it charges its users, the train operating companies (TOCs), such as First Capital Connect (FCC) and Stagecoach East Midlands Trains, to use its tracks. Part of the fall in its profits was down to an ORR-enforced cut in these charges.

On punctuality, Network Rail said it had improved punctuality, with a record 91% of trains arriving on time. However, the head of the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) rail union, Gerry Doherty, described Network Rail's claim of record punctuality as "poppycock". He said the figure of 91% was only a record because British Rail did not announce national figures. And said the largest region that did disclose performance, Southern, regularly achieved 95% punctuality figures. "Network Rail does not own one single train - it is a maintenance firm looking after track and signals. Punctuality is down to the private train operators who actually run the trains," Mr Doherty continued. He said the issue of punctuality should not be part of any bonus decision.

TSSA and another rail union, the RMT, are in dispute with Network Rail over plans to cut 1,500 maintenance and signaller's jobs. Industrial action planned for last month was suspended after the company succeeded in getting a High Court injunction against it. The issue has still to be resolved.

7. New Coalition Government & the rail industry.

With the creation of a Conservative/Lib-Dem coalition government after the General Election on May 6th, radical change has been promised in the rail industry. Indications are that the coalition's programme will "end Whitehall meddling" and that "micromanagement from Whitehall is getting in the way of innovation and making it harder to deliver the new capacity that passengers want". It promises to "put an end to this by radically scaling back the involvement of the Government (DfT) in areas such as timetabling and the purchasing of new rolling stock". In respect of Network Rail, the coalition agreement indicates "we will make Network Rail more accountable to its customers" and "turn the Rail Regulator (ORR) into a powerful passenger champion". It also commits to "longer rail franchises in order to give operators the incentive to invest in the improvements passengers want – like better services, better stations, longer trains and better rolling stock".

Transport Secretary Philip Hammond announced on 14th June that he wants the McNulty review of value for money in the rail industry to report back with its initial findings. The independent review by Sir Roy McNulty – launched by the former Labour Government last December – is to provide preliminary findings to inform government decisions on public spending in the autumn. It appears from George Osborne's Budget statement on 22 June that he is seeking more cuts from the DfT and putting focus on revenue spend rather than capital.

8. Department for Transport (DfT) cuts 2010-11

- A £309m reduction in the DfT's specific grants to local authorities. Likely to impact directly on Bedford Borough & Central Bedfordshire Council's LTP 3.
- The Secretary of State for Transport is consulting the London Mayor on a proposed £108m reduction in the DfT's grant to Transport for London (TfL), the same percentage reduction proposed across local government.
- Network Rail will reduce spend by £100m

- The DfT is also making £112m savings in its direct expenditure
- The DfT will not be going forward in 2010-11 with planned spend on the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) rolling stock schemes that have not already been contractualised.

Unfortunately the continuing delay to the Thameslink contract signing (for new trains) means that none of this fleet will be available in Control Period 4 (CP4).

One very startling survivor in the Value for Money & Spending Review exercises is the Luton – Dunstable guided busway, which has been given approval by the Government. Initial work took place on 1st June and was covered by BBC TV “Look East”. In a surprise move Luton Borough Council has received the official go ahead from Government to kick start the Busway, a major council project. It will also require support from Central Bedfordshire Council. Estimates indicate the cost to be of the order of £90m. In straitened times this scheme does not appear to deliver real value.

It has been strongly hinted, that along with other Government Departments, the DfT may be subject to 25% savings in the Autumn as a consequence of the Spending Review. The DfT’s budget could therefore be cut by more than 25% over the next four years. We will keep members advised on any impact to local services.

9. Central Bedfordshire Transport Strategy Team.

It may interest members to learn that this team are moving offices as of Monday 28th June. The postal address of the Transport Strategy Team at Central Bedfordshire Council will be:

Central Bedfordshire Council
Technology House
239 Ampthill Road
Bedford
MK42 9BD

Please note that telephone numbers and e-mail addresses will **not** be affected.

James Gleave is the Senior Strategic Transport Officer and he can be contacted as follows :

james.gleave@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Tel. 0300 3006516 & Mobile. 07958 350159

This Team are responsible for LTP 3 & for liaison with the rail industry. They are also involved (jointly with Luton) in the Luton – Dunstable guided busway, which has escaped spending cuts. In respect of LTP 3, it is unclear what is going to happen.

Senior local government officials nationally are to write to the DfT to request that the preparation of new statutory local transport plans is halted, given the current uncertainty about funding and policy. The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) agreed at its annual general meeting in June 2010 that the process for adopting councils’ new LTPs to replace those due to expire in April 2011 should be put on hold. The Transport Act 2000 introduced a statutory requirement to produce LTP 3, so it is possible the coalition may review this requirement.

The BCA is **very** disappointed to report that **no** liaison meetings have taken place with Central Beds (since they were established as a unitary authority in April 2009). Previously regular quarterly meetings had taken place with Mid Beds District Council, but this is no longer the case.

11. Flitwick Station - Taxis

Recent press coverage has indicated tensions at Flitwick between taxi operators/owners registered with Central Beds & licensed to ply at the railway station by FCC, and those without accreditation. FCC are acting on complaints received about taxi drivers using the station rank illegally and have held meetings with the Council. They issue permits to regulate the number using the rank to ensure its safe operation. Permits are issued only after checks are made that drivers have the correct licence and insurance.

A dedicated full-time officer patrols station taxi ranks on the Bedford to London Thameslink route, backed up by FCC's own ticket inspectors. Anyone caught will be blacklisted from receiving a permit in the future. FCC advise that they have issued 37 permits for the taxi rank at Flitwick station. They will continue to act to protect their customers' safety and the rights of those taxi drivers with the correct permit.

There is also the question of how many taxis can be safely accommodated in the restricted 'station approach' – without interfering with other users of the station (both vehicular & pedestrian).

Hopefully these will be addressed at the appropriate time, if the railway station & forecourt are incorporated into the proposed Flitwick Town Centre redevelopment.

12. Brent Cross – proposed new station on FCC

According to a recent article in the "Evening Standard" on Friday 25 June, the London Borough of Barnet approved the new £4.5bn Brent Cross-Cricklewood plan last week. Developers are Hammerson & Brookfield. However, the article indicates that it may be four years before there is any visible sign of activity. Indeed the article is headed-up : "Burghers of Barnet have four-year wait for their train" (a reference to the proposed new Brent Cross station on MML/FCC).

Eight years ago, Hammerson purchased part of the old sidings/depot complex at Cricklewood as part of a job lot sold for £63m by the receivers of Railtrack. Then four years ago, the drawings/plans were revealed for the rail site, with a 590,000 sq. ft. southern extension to the Brent Cross "Shopping Centre," a combined heat & power station feeding 7,500 new homes, several schools, and 4m sq.ft. of office space nestled near a new railway station on the adjacent MML.

The green light has now been given by the Government (Eric Pickles/DCLG) which says it will not review the plans backed enthusiastically by the LB of Barnet.

Note that Jonathan Joseph who heads up the developer's partnership has indicated that building the new (Brent Cross/FCC) station depends on the success of those 4m sq. ft. of offices - and curiously following last week's planning approval, that aspect within the announcement about the new railway station was curiously muted! A re-run of proposed new station at The Wixams, south of Bedford, perhaps?

13. East-West Rail Link

Members may be interested in the article : "2017 aim for Oxford - Bletchley reopening", pages 60 - 64 in Modern Railways, May 2010 edition. The map on page 64 illustrates the possible Milton Keynes & South Midlands rail network 2031, showing a Didcot to Bedford (semi-fast service) & a Milton Keynes Central - Bedford stopping service. Ridgmont is shown as a Parkway station with P/R, also served by Milton Keynes Transit (according to the key, so presumably a bus feeder service).

Question - if the article's implications & the train service proposals come to fruition, where will these trains be accommodated in the rebuilt Bedford station?

14. Sale of High Speed I (HSI)

On the 22nd June the Transport Secretary announced the sale of HSI, indicating the sale would help alleviate public debt. The route serves stations in France and Belgium from London St Pancras International, via Stratford, Ebbsfleet & Ashford.

As the government begins the sale of the UK's first high speed railway - High Speed I – it could be said that the proceeds generated will be used to save funds for future transportation projects. Transport Secretary Philip Hammond commented on how it is important to involve the private sector in the bidding process for the 68-mile route between London and the Channel Tunnel. He said the money raised through the sale will help cut public debt, adding: "High Speed I is a national success story and a world class railway operating to international standards." Mr Hammond added that passengers will also benefit "as the successful private bidder will be incentivised to attract new operators serving new routes".

15. Visit by BCA to West Hampstead

On Wednesday, BCA Committee members were invited to visit the combined FCC Control Centre and Network Rail Signalling Centre at West Hampstead. The intention was to understand how managers in FCC and Network Rail form an integrated team and work together in times of disruption. Right on cue, a circuit problem caused the failure of crossovers north of Luton, creating immense disruption for about two hours and causing BCA Chairman, Arthur Taylor to get no further than Luton Airport Parkway! However, Jim Allwood, Mark Spurgeon and John Henderson were given an example of good disruption management by FCC Managers Scott Brightwell and Derrick Kingdom.

Newsletter Editor on behalf of BCA Committee :
Layout Design and Distribution:

Andrew Long, M.Sc., FCILT.
Jim Allwood

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.