



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

Welcome to the March Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters' Association.

1. FCC Problems.

Over the last few months as a result of the driver's dispute and then due to the poor weather conditions, the service provided by FCC has been appalling. During this period the BCA has been in constant contact with FCC to ensure that the best possible service was provided. On several occasions we were able to get FCC to amend their revised timetable to insert extra stops at Flitwick to ease overcrowding and provide more trains.

On Friday 15th January the BCA Chairman along with the Chairman of APTU, met with Neal Laws the newly appointed Managing Director FCC and Michelle Smart the Customer Service Director FCC, to discuss the industrial dispute and the weather related service problems. The outcome of the meeting was:

1. Acceptance by FCC that they had let their customers down badly with information and communication. As a result major investment will take place in the Customer Information Systems (CIS) which will take up to 40 weeks to implement fully. The BCA will be closely monitoring this and will ask FCC for regular updates on progress;
2. Acceptance by FCC that the contingency timetable (when this has to apply) must be more robust;
3. All traction motors on Class 319s damaged by the snow will have been repaired by the second week of February, thus allowing all diagrammed car trains to run;
4. That a "compensation package" would be offered to customers in early February. This package has been increased from that originally offered, but not as much as the BCA or APTU would have liked.

FCC Compensation Package

The "compensation package" has been available from Monday 8th February. You may claim the discount, either online or via a postal application form available at stations with proof of purchase i.e. old tickets, receipt or photocopy of a relevant bank/credit card statement. Please note the following important dates

Apply for compensation by 31st March 2010

Renew your monthly season ticket before 30th April 2010

If you have any queries please telephone 0800 980 924 (09.00–17.00 Mon–Fri).

You should be aware (that where applicable) "Delay-Repay" applies in addition to the "compensation package". Details should be kept of where trains were late, cancelled or had additional stops inserted.

2. May 2010 Timetable

EMT

As you will be well aware the BCA has been lobbying very hard for the reinstatement of the Bedford stop in the 17.30 St Pancras Intl to Nottingham since its removal from the December 2008 timetable change. **The BCA has received a letter from EMT stating that they propose to stop the 17.30 at Bedford from the May 2010 timetable change subject** to confirmation from Network Rail. As a consequence to ensure that EMT meet the Franchise agreement of only five trains stopping at Bedford between 16.00 and 18.59, the 16.00 St Pancras Intl to Corby will be timed to depart at 15.59.

The Committee would like to thank all members (& our MPs) for their support which meant that our voice was heard and our arguments for the reinstatement accepted. We should add that London Travel Watch & Passenger Focus have also been very supportive – for which many thanks.

FCC

Details of (minor) changes are awaited. Once these are known we will pass them on to you.

3. Thameslink Programme

The BCA were represented at the Thameslink Consortium AGM on 21 January 2010 where presentations on the Thameslink Programme were made by:

- Graham Goodwin & Rob Smith, Network Rail Communications
- Roger Perkins, FCC Thameslink Programme Communications Manager
- Mark Stanistreet, DfT Programme & Sponsorship Team.

Work continues on this very important project that will bring big benefits to the users of the Thameslink route.

The DfT has recently announced that the current completion date of late 2015 has been put back to late 2016 as a result of the large amount of work required at London Bridge. The BCA will monitor the situation to ensure that the work is completed as soon as is possible.

Over the Christmas/New Year period the following work was completed:

1. Moorgate Junction at Farringdon was replaced by plain line;
2. A sewer was diverted at Farringdon;
3. A bridge was replaced at Blackfriars station;
4. The overhead AC electrification was extended to City Thameslink. The change over to the DC third rail will continue to be made at Farringdon. This extension will allow trains to continue on overhead to City Thameslink if they have problems at Farringdon switching over from AC to DC. The train can then crossover at City Thameslink and return north (or be recessed into Smithfield sidings), thus minimising any delays; and
5. A crossover was installed and brought into service between St Pancras Intl Low Level and Kentish Town. This will allow bi-directional working between these two stations, thus making it more operationally flexible when terminating trains at St Pancras Intl Low Level.

All the new class 377 trains have now been delivered and are now in service. The last train was 31 days late on its original delivery schedule!

This year the lengthening of station platforms continues and one of the major parts of the project will take place. This entails the closure of Blackfriars Station for a period (dates and duration to be confirmed). Trains will continue to run through

Blackfriars but will not stop. Customers will have to use either City Thameslink or Elephant & Castle during this period. This closure will allow the new through platforms to be built on the site of the old terminal bays and then the track moved across to the new platforms. As soon as we hear news of the actual dates of this work we will immediately let you know.

Easter Period (Friday 2nd April to Monday 5th April) – Work will take place at Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars and West Hampstead. Throughout this period no trains will operate through Central London. FCC will provide the following services:

4 trains per hour running semi-fast between Bedford and St Pancras.
2 trains per hour calling all stations between St Albans and St Pancras.

However, on Sunday 4th April between 02.00 and 08.00 trains to/from Bedford will terminate at Hendon with onward bus service to/from St Pancras. The first train to run from Bedford to St Pancras will be the 07.12 departure. The first train to run from St Pancras will be the 08.33 departure. All stations services will run only from St Alban to Kentish Town.

South of the river trains will operate as follows:

Friday 2nd April – 2 trains per hour London Bridge to Brighton.
2 trains per hour from London Bridge to the Sutton loop.
Saturday 3rd April – 2 trains per hour London Bridge to Brighton.
2 trains per hour from London Bridge to the Sutton loop.
Sunday 4th April – Normal Sunday service on both routes.
Monday 5th April – Normal Saturday service on both routes.

Further work on **May Bank Holiday Sunday 2nd May** at Luton will mean that all day Sunday EMT services will terminate at Bedford and FCC will provide a Replacement Bus service between Leagrave and St Albans from 23.00 on Saturday, all day Sunday and until 04.00 on Bank Holiday Monday morning.

4. Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration

The BCA understand that the planning application is imminent. Consequently a Public Meeting has been arranged as follows, to which BCA members are invited:

Thursday 18th March 2010 at 19.15
Guru Ravi Dass Centre, Guru Ravi Dass Lane, off Ashburnham Road (next to R A F A), opposite Bedford Midland railway station. Free parking is available at the Centre.

“PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BEDFORD STATION AREA”

Chair: Patrick Hall M P

Speakers John Nicholson- Chair Station Area ‘Working Party’

Paul Vann – Bedford Borough Council Economic Development (Growth)

Richard Hickman- Halcrow Consultants

Andy Parker- Network Rail

Questions and Answers session. Representatives also present from First Capital Connect.

(Station Area Working Party Tel. 01234 04774).

5. 2010 BCA AGM.

A date for your diary. The 2010 BCA AGM will be held on **Monday 17th May 2010** at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford (2 minutes walk from Bedford station) commencing at 19.30. Representatives from FCC and EMT will be in attendance to give presentations and answer your questions. We hope to avoid a clash with a Pool tournament in the adjoining bar area this year!

6. Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP 3)

English local transport authorities (outside London) are working on their next Local Transport Plans (LTP) to cover the third 5-year period from 2011 to 2016 and there will be opportunities for rail campaigners to contribute to the development of these new LTPs. *Delivering a Sustainable Transport System* is the DfT's overarching policy – it sets out five national transport goals: supporting economic growth; tackling climate change; promoting equality of opportunity; contributing to better safety, security and health; and improving quality of life and promoting a better environment.

Rail users might do well to focus on how their aims, included in such schemes as the "Thameslink Programme", MML electrification & the proposed EWR L, might achieve these outcomes when contributing to the LTP process in our particular areas. The consultation process should involve meetings with key stakeholders, mailshots and/or a web-based forum; most local authorities have details of the process on their websites (see Bedford Borough & Central Bedfordshire). Currently, each local authority is developing its draft LTP for publication hopefully by the summer of 2010. This will be followed by further consultation prior to publication of the final document. BCA Members are urged to respond with their views, both now and when the drafts are recirculated.

The BCA were represented at a Key Stakeholders Forum meeting at Borough Hall, Bedford on 4 February 2010. Bedford Borough Council has started work on creating its new LTP 3 and more than 50 key stakeholders were present to discuss the long-term transport vision to be incorporated into this. The LTP 3 will be placed in March 2011. The BCA understand that Central Bedford will be following a broadly similar process although we have no specific details as yet. As usual, we will endeavour to keep members informed.

7. Network Rail : East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS)

This was published in February 2010. The strategy was consulted upon in August 2009, when the BCA responded. Since then it has been subject to a period of discussion with industry partners and wider stakeholders. Network Rail have now submitted their RUS to the Office of Rail Regulation. Should ORR not issue a letter of objection, the RUS will become established in sixty days.

Both the Midland Main Line (MML) & the Thameslink route (to Blackfriars) fall within the scope of the RUS. Major changes planned to the network include the Thameslink Programme, the East Midlands Resignalling scheme and journey time (line speed) improvements on the MML. The Government is still examining the costs & benefits of electrifying the MML north of Bedford.

The RUS identifies Bedford as one of the most used stations in its area with a footfall of 3.2m passengers. Bedford has seen a 12% increase in passenger journeys to/from London St. Pancras International between 1996/97 & 2007/08. Development work is underway to examine the redevelopment of Bedford station, which may be part of the wider Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration scheme. A revised station layout, with remodelling should be delivered as part of the Thameslink Programme to help improve performance and capacity to accommodate growth. The current proposal provides a new line through the existing station onto a new platform on the east (Ashburnham Road) side of the station. Bay platform

1A (for Bletchley services) disappears under the proposed changes. Effectively platform 1 will become double sided, similar to the current island platform 2 & 3 in the middle of the present station layout.

Other schemes included in wider development proposals are being progressed at Flitwick, as part of the master plan for the town centre. It is hoped that a bus/rail interchange can be developed at Flitwick. The new station proposed at The Wixams is on 'hold' due to the economic climate and lack of third party funding. A particular disappointment, given the public sector funding for the Highway Agency's dualling of the A6, now complete on the other side of The Wixams!

Under "Use of the network" the RUS has identified the constraint at Bedford of platform congestion, exacerbated by reversing trains and difficulties accessing the riverside carriage sidings, carriage wash line and depot (Cauldwell Walk). It also highlights the speed differentials between EMT & FCC services on the fast lines between London & Leagrave. The MML south of Bedford operates at or near capacity for most of the day.

8. East West Rail Link (EWRL)

In November 2009 the East West Rail Consortium announced that it had the Central Section route options under consideration, although it is still developing a preferred option for reinstating a rail link between Bedford and Cambridge. A discussion paper was published in February 2009 identifying a number of alternative routes and invited comments from local and regional stakeholders as well as the DfT & Network Rail. A number of consultation responses (about sixty in total) were received and these have been reviewed by the Central Section Steering Group which was established to lead on development of this part of the route. The BCA took part in this process favouring a route alignment utilising the former Bedford-Hitchin railway line. In reviewing the responses it became clear that some additional feasibility work was required to clarify the relative benefits of the options, and this has been taking place in summer 2009.

The outcome of this further work was expected during December but has been delayed. It would enable the Central Section Steering Group to make its final recommendation on a preferred route option to the East West Rail Consortium by February/March 2010. Information about the final recommendation will be published when available.

Details of the Central Section Steering Group are:

Tel: 01992 556117 Email: centralsection@eastwestrail.org.uk

For more information please contact Trevor Mason at Hertfordshire County Council

on 01992 556117 or email on centralsection@eastwestrail.org.uk

Please note that Trevor Mason heads up the Central Section Steering Group.

Whilst the new unitary authorities at Bedford Borough & Central Beds are members of the East West Rail Consortium group of local authorities and government agencies (with the objective of securing a new rail route from East Anglia to Oxford via the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area), the BCA are unclear what their response has been on the Central Section as we have not had sight of their comments. More details of the project in general can be found online at: www.eastwestrail.org.uk The BCA were represented at an "Update Meeting on EWRL" at Milton Keynes Partnerships/HCA offices in Milton Keynes on 3rd March. The Consortium hope to update the details on their website shortly.

9. Chiltern Railways : Evergreen 3

The East West Rail Consortium has welcomed the official launch of Chiltern Railway's Evergreen 3 project by the Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis, on Friday 15 January 2010. Evergreen 3 is set to deliver a new rail route from London to Oxford by connecting the Chiltern and East West routes at Bicester and upgrading the line between

Bicester (Town station) and Oxford. The new route is planned to provide two trains an hour in each direction. The announcement is an important step towards the East West Rail Consortium's ambition to restore a rail link between Oxford and Cambridge. Part of the route will now be delivered by Chiltern Railways Evergreen 8 project resulting in significant cost savings for the project.

John Lewis, Chief Executive of Milton Keynes Partnership and Chair of the East West Rail (Western) Project Board said, "We are hugely supportive of Evergreen 8 as it marks a major step forward for rail services in the area and provides a boost to the East West Rail project. Aside from the cost saving benefits, Evergreen 8 will speed up the delivery of improvements which can only be good news for passengers."

The western section will deliver train services between Oxford, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Bedford and implementation will follow on immediately after the completion of the Evergreen 8 project. Neil Gibson, Chair of the East West Rail Consortium went on to say, "These two schemes are complementary and will provide a range of new services for passengers. We are working alongside Chiltern Railways as they develop Evergreen 8 to complete the design development for our western section. This is being done in accordance with Network Rail's design standards and is due to be completed in spring 2010."

In recognition of the benefits that the Western Section will deliver, Cllr David Robertson, Chairman of South East England's Regional Transport Board (RTB) said: "The announcement on Evergreen 8 is an important step towards the delivery of East West Rail. This vital piece of infrastructure will create thousands of jobs in the region and promote sustainable housing development in some of the South East's most important urban areas."

The East West Rail Consortium will continue to work closely with the Department for Transport and Network Rail in order to secure funding for the western section. Members are urged to lobby both Bedford Borough & Central Bedfordshire to engage positively on the proposals and to note that it would be even more helpful if EEDA, GO-East and EEPB (East of England Partnership Board – replacing EERA) engaged sensibly in a similar manner to their colleagues in South East England.

10. Inter-City Express (IEP) Programme shelved

No order will be placed for Inter-City Express Programme trains this side of the General Election, the Government has announced. An incoming government would therefore be able to cancel the project for a new generation of trains to replace the ageing HSTs (such as those currently used by EMT on some of their services). The statement from Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis issued on 26 February 2010 said:

"In order to replace Britain's ageing fleet of Intercity 125 trains (HSTs) and to invest in capacity and passenger journey improvements on the East Coast and Great Western Main Lines, the Government began the Intercity Express Programme procurement in 2007. The Programme's key objective has been to achieve value for money across the lifetime of the trains, taking account of costs right across the rail industry.

Good progress has been made, including the announcement of Agility Trains as a preferred bidder in February 2009. Over the course of the procurement, however, there has been a reduction in the capacity of the debt market to support the transaction as originally envisaged and passenger growth has also slowed. In addition the Government and Network Rail have committed to electrify the Great Western Main Line from 2016. The Government has identified appropriate adjustments to the original programme to take account of these developments. This has inevitably extended the contractual negotiations, which are not yet complete and would not be until mid-March at the earliest.

The negotiations are for a contract of nearly 30 years, a multi-billion pound spend over the course of many Parliaments. In all the circumstances, the Government does not believe it would be appropriate to enter into this particular contract in the immediate run up to a General Election. To ensure that a decision is taken at the beginning of the next Parliament on the basis of the full evaluation, the Secretary of State for Transport has today asked Sir Andrew Foster, former controller of the Audit Commission, to provide an independent assessment of the value for money of the Programme and the credibility and the value for money of any alternatives which meet the Programme's objectives. It is critical for rail passengers that the right long-term decision is made about the next generation of inter-city trains, which will have a life of 30 years or more.

The existing rolling stock dates back to the 1970s and needs to be replaced. If Sir Andrew Foster reaffirms that the InterCity Express Programme is better than the alternatives, the Secretary of State's intention would be to proceed with the project in the next Parliament, subject to satisfactory resolution of all the contractual issues. Sir Andrew Foster will consult Agility Trains, the Department, the relevant Train Operating Companies, the Office of Rail Regulation, Network Rail, passenger groups and the devolved Scottish and Welsh administrations. Sir Andrew Foster will report within three months. The report and the Government's response will be published and reported to Parliament. A copy of the letter from the Secretary of State to Sir Andrew Foster has been laid in the Libraries of the House."

11. Email contact with Members

The recent issues with FCC performance have highlighted the importance of having email addresses for members so urgent communication can be made where necessary. There have been a number of occasions during the winter when messages have been sent by email only to members as their information was either urgent or of limited relevance. If you have received a hard copy of this Newsletter, it is because Jim Allwood either has no email address for you or one that "bounced back". Please let Jim (on jim.allwood@virgin.net) have one if at all possible. Thanks.

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

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