



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

WELCOME to the March 2011 Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters Association.

1. BCA Annual General Meeting

At the last AGM, the Treasurer proposed that the Association's Annual General Meeting was moved from its usual May slot to late Autumn, so that it more closely co-incided with the Annual Accounts, which run from September to August. This was agreed and those attending also agreed that the next meeting would be held in 18 months time, rather than have two in a year. Consequently the next AGM will be held on Monday 7th November, although this date is only provisional at this stage.

2. First Capital Connect

The BCA, along with the APTU, met with Neal Lawson and Larry Heyman of FCC and Martin Self from Network Rail on 13th January to discuss the disruption to services before Christmas. FCC gave a presentation and this is now available on our website. It can also be downloaded from the APTU website:

http://www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/aptu_bca_presentation_13_jan.pdf

2.1 Contingency (Emergency) Timetable

- a) Both BCA & APTU said that 4tph service provided at peak times was totally inadequate as capacity is far exceeded by demand.
- b) It was rumoured that the capacity limitation at St Pancras Low Level was 4tph. Both Network Rail and FCC confirmed that this was not the case and the view is that 6tph could be handled. FCC cannot use the high level platforms during the day as they are all required for EMT services; however when EMT run a reduced service FCC can then use the spare capacity
- c) We said that we thought 6tph each of 8 cars should be the target minimum service level although we would like more.
- d) FCC said that the approach to contingency timetables is to be revisited – the current approach of splitting the service into North and South services does not allow for efficient use of available rolling stock thus reducing the frequency of services they can operate. We welcome this review and will follow this up as needed.

2.2 Infrastructure

- a) The normal response to bad weather especially snow is switch to a two track railway i.e. EMT on the fast lines, FCC on the slow lines. The aim of this is to reduce the risk of point problems and thus halting the service.
- b) During the first period of bad weather there were problems with the points north of Bedford which meant that all EMT southbound services to London could not stop at Bedford. This in turn meant additional people using the already reduced FCC services, causing severe overcrowding south of Luton. We asked that Network Rail ensure that this set of points is made an operational priority which they have agreed to do.
- c) Network Rail explained that points are heated, but are only partially effective in heavy snow as the heaters warm up the rails but snow in between the rails is not melted

and over time turns to ice and jams the points. A programme of installing monitoring equipment on points that gives an indication when they are about to fail is now under way. This will make it easier to plan the service.

2.3 Class 319 Doors

Despite the work on the doors over the last year and the acquisition of extra strong de-icer, problems still exist. Unfortunately this de-icer proved ineffective as the snow/ice was compressed so hard it was unable to reach where it was needed. FCC is now considering the installation of trace heaters in the doors to resolve the problem.

2.4 Communication

We commented on the communications problems during disruption and FCC accepted there was still room for improvement which they are trying to resolve. We will continue to press on this issue.

2.5 Compensation

Both BCA/APTU were strongly of the view that FCC should offer some form of compensation to recognise both the extensive disruption and communication problems that had been suffered from. We recognised that the disruption was not of the duration of the problems around Christmas 2009 and we also accepted FCC's view that an offer which reduced FCC's revenue was a non starter, as in the current climate this would be unacceptable to the DfT (FCC are in revenue support which means that 80% of a revenue shortfall is paid by the taxpayer). FCC were generally sympathetic on this, and agreed to take the issue away.

We have subsequently been told about the two free off-peak tickets offer for annual season ticket holders. For those who obtained their ticket through the website, these will be sent automatically; otherwise you will need to register. This can be completed at:

<http://www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/complimentary-tickets>

3. Thameslink Programme

During 2011 work will continue on the Thameslink Programme. Some of this work will involve disruption to services. Please carefully note the following :

3.1 Bedford Station Works

From 14 February until 23 October, there will be major disruption at Bedford, as outlined below:

14 February - 21 May 2011 and 12 September - 23 October 2011 2310 Saturday nights until 1600 Sundays

- From 2310 Saturdays until 0300 Sundays there will be no access to platform 3 at Bedford and then...
- from 0300-0810 – no access at all to Bedford station/CS/Cauldwell. Services to start/terminate at Flitwick with bus transfers between Flitwick and Bedford and finally...
- from 0810-1600 – services to use platforms 2 & 3 only at Bedford.

22 May - 11 September 2011

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- from 0810-1600 – services to use platform 3 only at Bedford. Services cut to 2 tph with remaining 2 tph to start/terminate at Luton.

3.2 Autotransformer Power Upgrade Works

There will be an all lines block between St Pancras International and Luton on four Sundays between **1 May and 17 July** as outlined below:

- **0300 Sunday 1 May to 0400 Monday 2 May** – Blocked between London St Pancras and St Albans. FCC to operate 3 tph between Bedford and St Albans. EMT services to start/terminate at Luton
- **0300-1430 Sunday 29 May** – Blocked between London St. Pancras and Luton. FCC to operate 4 tph between Bedford and Luton. EMT services to start/terminate at Luton.
- **1430 Sunday 29 May to 0400 Monday 30 May** – Blocked between London St. Pancras and Harpenden. FCC to operate 4 tph between Bedford and Harpenden. EMT services to start/terminate at Luton.
- **0300-1430 Sunday 26 June** – Blocked between London St. Pancras and Harpenden. FCC to operate 4 tph between Bedford and Harpenden. EMT services to start/terminate at Luton.
- **0300-1430 Sunday 17 July** – Blocked between London St. Pancras and Harpenden. FCC to operate 4 tph between Bedford and Harpenden. EMT services to start/terminate at Luton.

3.3 Bedford Station Car Park Lighting

Back in November 2010, contractors working for Network Rail on a gantry north of the station severely affected the power cables to the car park lights. These were finally fixed this week but following representations by the BCA, portable lighting units were installed to alleviate the situation until this work was completed.

3.4 Blackfriars Station



Members will be aware that Blackfriars Station reopened on schedule on Monday 17th January but is still very much “work in progress”. It is planned to open the new South Bank entrance along with the Underground Station in December this year. In some earlier documentation published in an engineering magazine, the accesses from this new entrance were not clear. However FCC have confirmed that stairs and lifts will lead to all platforms.

4. Launch of Bedford Stations Travel Plan

The launch of the Bedford Stations Travel Plan will be on Tuesday 15th March 2011 (06.00 – 11.00) and Thursday 17th March 2011 (16.00 – 20.00). It is proposed to provide passengers with additional information which Bedford Borough Council representatives will have in the station forecourt area on the launch days. Relevant information available on both days will include bus timetables, cycle information/maps, walking routes, etc. A *Passenger Travel Survey* will be handed out to passengers during the course of the event. Members are urged to complete and return this survey.

5. Meeting with EMT

The BCA had a useful meeting with Gareth Leslie, the EMT Route Manager, on 27th January. The following was discussed:

- a) EMT services during the recent bad weather, It was noted that EMT services generally run well apart from when problems with the points north of Bedford meant no southbound EMT services called at Bedford. This was taken up with Network Rail at the meeting with FCC (see item 1.2)
- b) Changes to the EMT timetable from May 2011 that the BCA would like to see were discussed. These consisted of the return of the half hourly service to Leicester and the north, an additional stop at Bedford on the 06.37 St Pancras to Sheffield and a stop at East Midlands Parkway on the off-peak Nottingham semi-fast services that call at Bedford. The BCA has sent a letter to EMT confirming these requested changes. It remains to be seen whether EMT will respond in a positive manner.
- c) The BCA were looking for improvements to the cleaning of train toilets which EMT agreed were being looked at.
- d) Gareth said that on trains where the trolley service could not get through due to the numbers of standing passengers, the trolley would use the buffet area.
- e) 8 new CSI screens were to be provided at the barrier end and half way along the platforms at St.Pancras. Also, on the main CSI screen additional departures will be displayed along with an arrivals board. It is anticipated the work will be complete by the end of July.
- f) Work has commenced at Derby Etches Park Depot on the refurbishment of the Meridian trains and will provide a completely new look interior, with leather seats in First Class and new seat covers and carpeting throughout the Standard Class coaches. All 27 of EMT's Class 222 "Meridian" trains will be completely refurbished.

6. Ticket Gates

The installation of ticket gates at Harpenden and Leagrave is progressing to timetable. FCC hope to have the works complete by the spring. These new gates will improve security for customers and recoup some of the £400 million the rail industry collectively loses in fare evasion every year.

7. London & South (LSE) Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS).

The Chairman of the BCA attended a consultation briefing to Rail User Groups (RUGs) on 24th January 2011. A presentation was given by Network Rail to update RUGs on the latest situation. The draft strategy was published on 16th December 2010 with the final

document being published in the Summer 2011. There is now a consultation period and any comments must be sent to Network Rail by 18th March 2011.

The strategy covers all rail routes that radiate from London - which therefore includes the Midland Main Line (MML). In respect of the MML the RUS says that the Thameslink Programme will provide the bulk of the extra capacity that is needed to meet the current and predicted future demand. However, the principal future crowding concerns is forecast to relate to commuters from towns such as Wellingborough and Bedford using longer distance trains (EMT services). To resolve this it recommends the replacement of High Speed Trains (HST) with IEP or similar new trains. The RUS also agrees that the MML should be electrified.

The document it is available on: <http://goo.gl/j9UxJ>

8. Midland Main Line electrification.

Network Rail has plans to electrify the Midland Main Line north of Bedford but currently has no funding for the project. This may be included as part of the proposals to be included in Network Rail's next Control Period (CP5) from April 2014 to March 2019. The BCA would encourage our MPs, SEMLEP, both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire and others, to support electrification of the Midland Main line and the prospect of new electric trains (IEP) for services along the route.

It is also vital that Bedford station is recognised as a "Gateway" station improvement, given its significance as part of the Thameslink Programme, East-West Rail and potential Midland Main Line electrification.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, announced on the 1st March that the Great Western Main Line would be electrified to Bristol and Cardiff. This will also include the procurement of new IEP (Agility Trains) rolling stock to replace the "ageing" HSTs (Inter-City 125s) dating back to British Rail. The BCA hope that the MML electrification and new IEP trains for this route might follow in due course. Stagecoach EMT also operate old HSTs in their fleet of trains!

9. Local Transport Plans 3 (LTP 3).

Both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire have recently produced their LTP 3s. The LTP is a statutory requirement introduced by the Transport Act 2000 and amended by the Transport Act 2008. The Councils will set the framework for the delivery of all aspects of transport & travel for the period from April 2011 through to 2026 (15-year period). Consultation drafts of both were available in late 2010/early 2011. Both local authorities are presenting their LTP 3 documents to Council for approval shortly. Progress has not been as productive with Central Beds as it has with Bedford Borough, which is very disappointing for the BCA and its members who use Flitwick Station.

10. Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration.

The Focus DIY unit has recently been demolished with a view to the first phase of the proposals for the Bedford Station Quarter Regeneration being put in place. It is unclear if in the short term, the area will be used to expand the Borough Council run car park

Network Rail has also carried out clearance work on the south side of the Ford End Road bridge as a commencement of Thameslink Programme preparations at Bedford.

11. East-West Rail campaigners bid for Regional Growth Fund cash.

The East West Rail Consortium ultimately wants to create a new cross-country rail link between Reading & Cambridge via Oxford and Bedford. Current efforts are concentrated on the Western Section of route, linking Reading, Oxford, Bicester, Aylesbury to Milton Keynes & Bedford. The section between Oxford and Bicester will be re-built with new stations under the Evergreen 3 Project (Oxford – Bicester – London Marylebone) which recently completed its public inquiry and requires no government funding. The Evergreen 3 Project may eventually include a new north-south link between Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, High Wycombe and London Marylebone.

The Consortium is seeking £4m from the Regional Growth Fund towards the £5m costs of the next development stage (GRIP 5) of the Western Section of the project. Local authorities and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) would provide the other £1m. The bid is backed by two of the newly created Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) - the Oxfordshire City Region and the South East Midlands - as well as the Buckinghamshire Economic & Learning Partnership. Successful round one bids are expected to be announced in April.

There is growing confidence that Ministers will eventually approve the project, which has an estimated benefit:cost ratio (BCR) of 6.3. The DfT has announced that the Western Section is a candidate for next High Level Output Specification (HLOS) due to be published in July 2012 for the rail industry's next five-year control period (2014/15 - 2018/19).

If you would like to support the EWRL project, and the prospect of additional train services at Bedford, please visit www.railfuture.org.uk/ox-cam and click the 'Register your support' button.

12. Graffiti on rolling stock

Members are probably aware of the increased number of trains with graffiti. The BCA raised this again with FCC who issued the following statement:

"Over the past six months we have seen an increase in vandalism to our units south of the Thames, mainly on Southeastern trains locations. This increase is not just confined to our fleet but also to that of Southeastern and Southern TOCs. We are working with both our industry partners, Network Rail and the British Transport Police, to make the sites we berth at more secure. The BTP have stepped up covert surveillance and recently we have had successful prosecutions of four vandels in the Kent area who between them caused over £1 million worth of damage to the railway in the past year.

We plan to get units back to depots for repair as soon as possible after the damage has been reported but sometimes the train plan and stock availability does not allow us to do this as soon as we would like. In addition the recent extremely cold weather had a very detrimental affect on the effectiveness of the chemicals we use to remove the graffiti. The chemical is citris based and extreme cold inerts the chemical reaction needed to remove paint. This could give the impression that the number of graffiti attacks had increased. If the graffiti is offensive or the windows are covered the train is removed immediately and the damage rectified. If not we plan to remove at the first possible opportunity. We aim to remove the graffiti without the need for either cancelling or short-forming trains.

To date this financial year we have spent over £220K on replacing damaged vinyl caused by graffiti on the Class 319 fleet alone".

13. The Wixams – Planning Application for a New Station

Proposals for the new station at The Wixams (planning application 10/02805/MAF) were submitted to Bedford Borough Council on 12 November 2010 and registered on 23 January 2011. This comprises a new four platform railway station with associated access road, forecourt, station building (modular) and multi-storey/surface car parks. A public square with ancillary retail units is also proposed. Planning permission has yet to be granted for the station, although construction is planned to be completed by the end of 2014. It is intended that the station will be modular, being very similar to Corby (Northamptonshire). Detailed provision is as follows:

- 1) Modular Station Building to serve 4tph during the peak and 2 tph off peak
- 2) 4 x 245m length platforms to accommodate 12 car trains
- 3) Step-Free access to all platforms (over bridge to include passenger lifts)
- 4) 450 space multi-storey car park and 150 space surface car park
- 5) 80 cycle spaces and 12 motor cycle parking spaces
- 6) 28 Disabled car parking spaces
- 7) 20 Short stay car parking spaces
- 8) 4 Bus Bays

It is expected that only FCC trains will call at this station. The primary role of this station will be to serve the new settlement of The Wixams, a 4,500 home development taking place on the Elstow Storage Depot site on the border of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council and developed by J.J.Gallagher & various housebuilders. The station forms a key part of the sustainable transport plans of this new development, playing a particularly important role in encouraging the residents of The Wixams to travel to Bedford, Luton, St Albans, and London by public transport. The new station will also provide a new transport interchange for people living in the northern Marston Vale area. However, access is only likely to be off the Amphill to Bedford Road and not the re-aligned A6

It is understood that Central Bedfordshire Council supports the principle of the new station as part of developing a sustainable community at The Wixams, whilst also improving access to public transport for residents in the northern Marston Vale area. The authority is keen to work with Gallagher Estates, Network Rail, First Capital Connect, and Bedford Borough Council to deliver an effective station interchange, including the station car park, that will benefit current and future residents in the immediate area.

14. South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP)

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) along with the Regional Growth Fund are expected to underpin future regeneration activity, covering real economic areas and as Vince Cable and Eric Pickles have outlined creating 'the right environment for business and growth'. Greg Clark described them as 'joint local authority and business-led organisations that match economic reality on the ground and can make a real difference'.

Both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire are part of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP)

With proposals for setting up LEPs contained in a White Paper, it is important SEMLEP helps in delivery of rail schemes. Can it be used to help delivery, for example of EWRL & Midland Main Line electrification and what are the implications for economic development and regeneration in the future in our area given better rail transport infrastructure?

15. All change at Network Rail.

Network Rail will shortly reveal a huge structural change. The not-for-profit group is to devolve power to **nine** regional managing directors, in response to the review of rail spending by Sir Roy McNulty. The regional heads will have a greater say in key matters such as safety, investment, customer service & maintenance of the rail network. Each will have a budget of up to £800m a year and be responsible for about 3,000 staff.

The nine regions are set up to mirror the routes and organisation of the train operating franchises. The Scotland and Wessex routes will be the first to make the change, starting in April 2011. The Wessex region covers lines operated by South West Trains (Stagecoach SWT) from Waterloo to Surrey, Hampshire, Dorset & Devon. The other seven regions will make the transition to the new structure over the next twelve months.

In the last eight years Network Rail has worked in partnership with the industry to transform Britain's rail services. Now, following the appointment of David Higgins as their new Chief Executive, the next chapter is ready to be written. The focus will be on providing greater levels of safety, accountability and transparency while devolving their organisation to a number of key routes. The mission will be to deliver additional capacity and improved performance for passengers in partnership with train operators (TOCs) and freight companies.

When further information in respect of the Midland Main Line responsibility within Network Rail is known, members will be kept informed.

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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
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