



# BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

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## OCTOBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

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### I. **BCA AGM**

This year the BCA AGM will be held on Monday 4th November 2019 at the RAFA Club, 93 Ashburnham Road, Bedford commencing at 19.30 (3 minute walk from Bedford Station).

The following representatives will be present to give presentations and answer any questions you may have:

Tom Moran – Managing Director Thameslink and Great Northern  
Julian Edwards – Managing Director - East Midlands Railway  
Representative (to be confirmed) – Network Rail

We would welcome any member who would like to join the Committee. Please contact the Chairman on 01525 715454.

The AGM is a great opportunity for you to question senior management of Thameslink and EMR about Performance, EMT Franchise, Timetable issues, fares and any other issue you may have so [please attend and have your say](#)

For members from Flitwick who wish to attend the AGM you are advised to show your ticket to the gate line staff at Bedford station who will allow you through without the need to pay.

### 2. **Passenger Benefit Fund**

The BCA responded to the Passenger Benefit Fund with the following ideas for Bedford and Flitwick:

#### Bedford

Priority 1 - Provide ventilation on the station footbridge by inclusion of large trickle vents to promote cross ventilation.

Priority 2 - Provide water point to allow refilling of containers for customer journeys.

Priority 3 - Provide an additional Summary CIS on Platform 1 near the ticket hall entrance.

Priority 4 - Provide mat on floor of the ticket hall during wet weather.

Priority 5 - Provide general waste bins along side recycling bins.

Priority 6 - Provide an additional Ticket Vending Machine (TVM).

Priority 7 - Refurbish the station toilets.

### Flitwick

Priority 1 – Provide Ticket Office extension on the Station Approach Road side.

Priority 2 – Provide 6 x set of 3 seats on Platform 1.

Priority 3 - Provide water point to allow refilling of containers for customer journeys.

Priority 4 - Provide drink and confectionary vending machine.

Priority 5 - Provide heated Waiting Room on Platform 2/3.

Priority 6 - Provide an additional CIS on Platform 1.

Priority 7 - Provide clearer directional signage for the Car Park.

Priority 8 – Improve GTR App for during/post disruption for deaf people.

The Chairman has recently spoken to Thameslink asking for an update which is as follows:

*“We are currently reviewing all the submissions for the GTR managed stations within the Passenger Benefit Fund with the aim of making a submission to the DfT with the proposed schemes by 13 September.*

*The DfT have agreed that they will review and come back with any comments by the end of September so we can start our design/implementation stage and feasibility studies from 1 October.*

*We aim to let stakeholders know what the proposed schemes at the end of September following the DfT’s review. We have listed the schemes in priority order so if any of the top schemes at a station are not feasible for whatever reason then we can move onto the next one on the list.”*

### **3. East Midlands Franchise**

As reported in our last newsletter Abellio were awarded the East Midlands Franchise which commenced on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August.

Key changes under Abellio EMR are :

- The timetable change will be from December 2020
- 33 new five car Hitachi AT300 trains similar to the Class 800/802 units being supplied to GWR & LNER will be introduced, deliveries commencing in 2022
- The coaches on these will be 24M long (26M on GWR & LNER sets); they will have one extra diesel engine, four spread out over the five carriages of each train set
- Class 360 Desiro 4 car EMUs will be cascaded in from Greater Anglia for use on London St. Pancras – Corby services once Network Rail complete the electrification. These units will be refurbished with 2 + 2 seating, tables between seats, Wi-Fi and re-gearred to operate up to 110 mph.
- Class 170 DMUs will be used for cross-country/local services (once again cascaded-in from Greater Anglia, by their introduction of new Stadler Flirts & other trains)
- £20M investment in stations.

What will this mean for passengers from Bedford:

- Our understanding at the present time is that a new timetable will operate from December 2020.
- From that date no direct Intercity services to Nottingham will stop at Bedford as they do at present.
- Bedford will be served by a half hourly service from St Pancras to Corby calling at Luton Airport Parkway, Luton, Bedford, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.
- EMR trains will resume stopping at Bedford during peak periods.
- Passengers for stations north of Kettering will have to change at Kettering.
- Class 360s will be used for the St Pancras to Corby service and will be formed of 8 coaches off peak and 12 coaches at peak time.

The BCA is totally opposed to the removal of the direct services to Nottingham. The Chairman attended the official launch event and spoke to several senior managers about this very pressing issue which they are now fully aware of. Over the next few months we will be meeting with EMR management to lobby for the reinstatement of these services.

#### **4. Flitwick Station – Access For All**

As outlined in the previous newsletter the Chairman sent the following letter to the DfT three times and received an unsatisfactory reply on each occasion. The letter was then sent to the Rail Minister hoping for a satisfactory reply, however once again the answer was unsatisfactory. Please see the Rail Ministers reply below our original letter:

*“For several years we have lobbied for Access For All funding for Flitwick station. We were extremely disappointed to see that yet again we did not secure the funding. We noted that other stations on Thameslink North were successful, these being Mill Hill Broadway, Cricklewood and Biggleswade.*

*We cannot understand why Cricklewood and Biggleswade were successful and Flitwick unsuccessful due to the following reasons:*

- 1. Flitwick was the top priority for GTR for this funding*
- 2. Over the next 3/4 years a new station at Brent Cross approx 1 mile north of Cricklewood on the Midland Main Line is to be built and will be AFA compliant*
- 3. The latest footfall for Flitwick is 1,587,176 and Cricklewood 967,022*
- 4. The latest growth figure for Flitwick is 4.5% and Cricklewood 2.5%*
- 5. Both footfall and growth at Biggleswade are lower than Flitwick*
- 6. Flitwick is the rail hub for Ampthill and surrounding villages*
- 7. There is considerable house building taking place at Flitwick, Ampthill and surrounding villages*
- 8. Flitwick is the nearest rail station to Center Parcs Woburn Forest Holiday Village*
- 9. There are many young families with buggies that use Flitwick station who would greatly benefit from lifts*
- 10. Many leisure travellers with heavy luggage use the direct rail services to Luton and Gatwick Airports who would greatly benefit from lifts*

*I would appreciate if you could furnish me with detailed reasons why Flitwick was unsuccessful and Cricklewood and Biggleswade were successful.*

*For all the reasons outlined above I would ask you to reconsider your decision and add Flitwick to the list of stations that have been allocated Access For All funding.*

*I look forward to your reply.*

On the next page is the reply from the Rail Minister:

*From the Minister of State  
Chris Heaton-Harris MP*

*Arthur Taylor  
Chairman Bedford Commuters Association*

*Dear Arthur*

*Thank you for your email of 3 July to Andrew Jones, regarding the nomination of Flitwick Station to Access for All. I am sorry that you are disappointed in my Department's responses to your recent correspondence.*

*I am aware that you have written into the Department 3 times now, regarding the unsuccessful nomination for Flitwick Station. It is my understanding that on each of these occasions, you received responses which detailed the criteria used in the decision-making process, to help explain why the nomination for Flitwick Station was unsuccessful.*

*Unfortunately, I am not sure what more I can usefully add to these previous replies and I have attached the responses to all 3 of these replies for your reference.*

*I am copying this letter to Nadine Dorries MP*

*Yours sincerely,  
NUSRAT GHANI*

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> July Nadine Dorries, Member of Parliament for Mid-Bedfordshire, held a debate in Parliament (Westminster Hall) calling for step-free access to the platforms at Flitwick station. If you wish to read what was said you can view it on the Government website.

#### Flitwick Needs a Lift - Petition

Recently the lack of lifts at Flitwick have been highlighted on BBC Look East. A petition for funding to make stations disabled accessible has been launched. We strongly recommend that members sign this petition - <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/266721>

We will continue to lobby for lifts at Flitwick Station.

#### **5. Performance**

Recently performance has been patchy with some major infrastructure failures. The first incident was a result of the very hot weather which caused the overhead wires to expand and droop which eventually caused the wires to come down in Belsize Tunnel. It took five days to complete the job of rewiring. The second event was the loss of power from the National Grid which caused major disruption on 9<sup>th</sup> August. As a result the APTU/BCA wrote the following to Thameslink:

“I refer to last Friday's problems with power, in particular the issues the Class 700s (and Class 717s) on AC experienced. As a stakeholder it is very concerning that the power interruption caused a need for widespread passenger detrainment from Class 700s due to an inability by drivers to restart many of them (which by all accounts seems, generally, not to be a 'driver error').

Both APTU and the BCA are interested to know of the analysis underway (and partly completed?) to properly understand the root causes of the problems on Friday, of the changes that will be (and have already been) made so that future power losses have much less impact (accepting at this stage, pending analysis, many changes are likely to be identified only tentatively and described at a

relatively high level'; however, presumably, there may already be some implemented "quick wins" and known actions).

We would expect this analysis to include:

1. Changes to Siemens City Desiro software (eg. we have heard that many units would not reboot and that a visit by a technician with a laptop was needed etc, there are suggestions that a central system failed and part of the problem was the software effectively couldn't 'phone home'). In particular, it is of concern that in many cases we understand that a technician needed to get to the train to recover its software. Presumably, this meant a considerable number of extra train evacuations were required.
2. Changes to Siemens City Desiro operational procedures (eg. some units were apparently rebooted successfully, which presumably means there are learning lessons for procedures; pro tem, pending software changes, appropriately configured laptops & cables could be kept at key stations 'just in case' etc).
3. Resilience improvements to systems at Three Bridges (eg. we have heard of Siemens systems there failing [which may have caused some of the problems in #1]).
4. Review of the train evacuation procedures, including consideration of additional training for drivers, steps that can be taken to reduce the time to start evacuating and equipment provision (see below, should a ladder be carried, for instance). For your info, I've had member feedback regarding their experiences of their train evacuation (with their wife) that Friday afternoon, which is below. All in all, I think I regard this aspect as more being about continuous learning and improvement, rather than (at least on TL) suggesting that there are fundamental flaws to be overcome. I don't think the comments below should be taken as a personal criticism of the driver on the train; rather they should be taken as reflective of the 'system as a whole'. I don't know who the office person was, but she appears to have had some very useful "soft skills". It does beg the question whether an initial step should be to always get a second member of staff (with appropriate PTS training) to all stalled trains where evacuation looks like a distinct possibility.

Specifically, has this incident been formally reported to the RAIB and are they going to investigate? To me, looking at it from an informed risk management perspective, but much less informed about railway practice and protocols, the topic for review would be "why was a train in operation that had a common vulnerability to power outages which could (and did) require the operator to have to organise many simultaneous train evacuations (because it was going to take a long time to re-start them)?" It seems me that there are 'wake up call' elements to this in the same way the Dock Junction passenger self-evacuation incident in the First Capital Connect days was."

### **Thameslink replied:**

*"9<sup>th</sup> August Incident – Review Update*

The scale of this incident on our network was unprecedented and OfGem has launched an investigation and published an initial report which can be found here:  
<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications-and-updates/ofgem-launches-investigation-power-cuts>.

This report confirms that this particular event has not occurred in the previous ten years.

Due to the drop in the frequency of the overhead line voltage, our 60 Class 700 and Class 717 Siemens (approx. 60 in total) Desiro City trains operating on the overhead power initially shut down, protecting the onboard systems and electronics. Of these, half were restarted by the driver when the power was restored, and the rest needed a technician to reset them. Many of these trains were between stations and required evacuation. This meant it took a considerable

amount of time to re-energise the trains and despite our best endeavours affected the service and our customers for the rest of the evening.

We recognise this made for a very difficult evening for our customers and our priority throughout the evening was to protect the safety of our customers and support people to get home. We encouraged customers to contact us if they had any reasonable additional costs in respect of hotels or taxis that were self-booked and encouraged them to claim Delay Repay compensation. We are also offering Delay Repay compensation to any season ticket holder who was unable to travel.

These were a very challenging set of circumstances, and we are working with National Grid, and our partners at Network Rail and Siemens, to understand more about what happened, why some trains required a technician to re-start and to ensure any necessary lessons are learnt to mitigate the effect on customers in the unlikely event of a repeat incident.

We would like to assure you that GTR does hold a range of contingency plans for disruptive events that may take place on our network. There are over 100 of them and they are regularly reviewed. These plans contain both operational plans for the management of the train service and customer plans which detail travel alternatives and how these are communicated to customers. Usually our customer journey alternatives may involve cross route travel by car or bus e.g. Luton to Hitchin or St Albans to Hatfield. However, on this occasion both the Midland Mainline (St Pancras to Bedford) and the East Coast Mainline (Kings Cross to Cambridge) were disrupted. This meant our only practical option was to move customers via other transport providers including buses and taxis.

There are insufficient standby capacity of buses and taxis on a Friday evening to replace a full train service. We sourced every available bus which we could, and we arranged the following journey alternatives to support our customers to travel home:

- 37 buses were sourced to provide bus replacement services
- Taxis were arranged across the route
- Ticket acceptance was made available via other train operators (London Overground, London Underground, Greater Anglia, Cross Country and East Midlands on all reasonable routes) and bus companies (TfL buses and other various operators)
- Tickets for Friday were accepted on Saturday, Sunday and Monday

This information was promoted through our websites, Apps, National Rail Enquiries and social media. The messaging was also shared with our staff so they had the same information to pass directly to customers and this was all supported with station announcements. We do however understand it was difficult to make travel arrangements as options were more limited due to the scale of the issue and its associated impact.

We hope this explains the context of the disruption on Friday 9 August. Despite the provision of established contingency plans it is not practical to replace a large rail service provision with road alternatives at short notice. A number of industry investigations are underway to learn lessons from this event and mitigate the impact on our customers of any future incident.

Appendices to the Official Technical Report on the events of 9<sup>th</sup> August have been published. GTR produced a review which is as follows:

[Title Power Surge Disruption on 9th August 2019: Technical Review. Date 3rd September 2019](#)

[Event Summary](#)

1. From information supplied by the National Grid at 1653 on Friday the 9th of August the frequency of the OLE AC voltage supply dropped below 49Hz for 16 seconds. It dropped below 48.89Hz to a minimum of 48.8 Hz for milliseconds.
2. There was no identified OLE AC Voltage supply interruption.
3. All Desiro City class 700 and 717 units operating on AC Voltage suffered a Protective Shutdown where the converter, known as the 4QC (4 Quadrant Controller) shut down. None of the other AC trains in the GTR fleet suffered any power related issues from this event e.g. Class 387, Class 365, Class 313.
4. In Passenger Service this involved circa 60 units, consisting of Class 700 FLU/RLUs and Class 717, suffering a 4QC lock out.
5. The effect of the 4QC shutting down on the train is that the train switches to battery power which causes a loss of HVAC (fan only fresh air supply), stand by reduced lighting (emergency lighting is activated when battery voltage drops), no at seat power, no PIS displays (audio only from the cab), and no traction power. The GSM-R radio remains active.
6. Following failed attempts to repower the trains, the established first response for a train failing with these symptoms is for the Driver to perform a reboot of the train known as a Battery Reset. This takes approximately 10 minutes.
7. Fleet Control diagnosed the issue quickly and a global GSM-R call was broadcast to instruct drivers to carry out the Battery Reset process.
8. After this 27 of the affected units were recovered.
9. The remaining circa 30 units required the Protective Shutdown to be unlocked by the intervention of a Technician with a laptop attending each unit.
10. There were 17 Technicians available at the time of the event. These 17 were immediately sent to stranded units with laptops and a further 24 technicians were mobilized within the next hour. The trains affected were widely spread geographically and some were not easily accessible.
11. Therefore, this process took some time and resulted in 23 train evacuations and severe levels of service disruption.

### Cause

1. The Desiro City from Siemens Mobility is the latest generation software enabled commuter train, so requiring protection against power supply frequency excursions for safety reasons and to protect low power electronics.
2. Siemens Technical Specification for the train states that the train will continue to operate with supply frequency drops down to 48.5Hz for short periods of time.
3. The NR Electrification System Compatibility document, NR/GN/ELP/27010 (“Guidance for compatibility between electric trains and electrification systems”), a Manufacturing and Supply Agreement compliance requirement, identifies that the supply frequency can fall to 48.5Hz in extreme conditions.
4. A review of the Class 700 NoBo design submission (Siemens document A6Z00036309602 item 4.2.8.2.2) shows that compliance with both NR/GN/ELP 27010 and EN 50163 (“Railway Applications – Supply Voltages of Traction Systems”) would be demonstrated.
5. Following investigations, Siemens advised that the supply frequency response of the train was designed to comply with the EN 50163 Clause 4.2 Note 2. This note permits train drives to be disconnected at 49Hz. Use of this supply frequency value in the train design led to the train protectively shutting down its drives when the supply frequency response fell below 49Hz.
6. Importantly Siemens have also clarified that there should not have been a Permanent Lockout on the train following a protective shutdown caused by a supply voltage frequency drop. All trains should have been recoverable via Battery Reset whereas 30 trains were not recoverable. This was not the intended behaviour of the train.
7. Therefore, the affected Class 700 and 717 sets did not react according to their design intent in these circumstances. The risk of this happening was not known prior to the power event on Friday 9 August.

8. Separately as a part of the new TCMS (Train Control Management System) software version 3.27, the ability for the driver to recover from a Permanent Lockout by using the Battery Reset process was removed.

9. On the 9th of August all the units which required a Technician to recover power were at software level 3.27 or above. The 28 units recovered by the driver performing a Battery Reset were at the previous TCMS software level of 3.25 or below.

### Conclusion

1. All the Class 700 and Class 717 trains operating on AC suffered a Protective Shutdown of the 4QC controller because of a drop in the supply frequency below 49Hz for 16 seconds.

2. This was not how the train system had been specified to operate. This event should not have caused a Permanent Lockout fault on the trains.

3. The effects of this were exacerbated as the fleet was undergoing a software change, contained in this was a change in functionality removing the Battery Reset remedy for Permanent Lockout events.

4. This meant that the driver could not recover failed trains which were operating on the new software, instead a Technician was required to attend.

### Planned Mitigation

1. Siemens are developing a software patch to allow units which protectively shutdown below 49Hz supply frequency to recover themselves without the need of a reboot or laptop when the frequency rises above 49.5Hz.

2. It is not proposed by Siemens or GTR to revert units to previous software versions as there are concerns this could severely impact unit availability. Based on discussions with the National Grid Head of Networks, the risk of frequency excursion dropping below 49Hz before the patch is fully introduced are considered extremely unlikely.

3. In addition to this Siemens will investigate how the train could be made to operate for a short time with supply.

The link to this document is as follows:

<https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/152351/download>

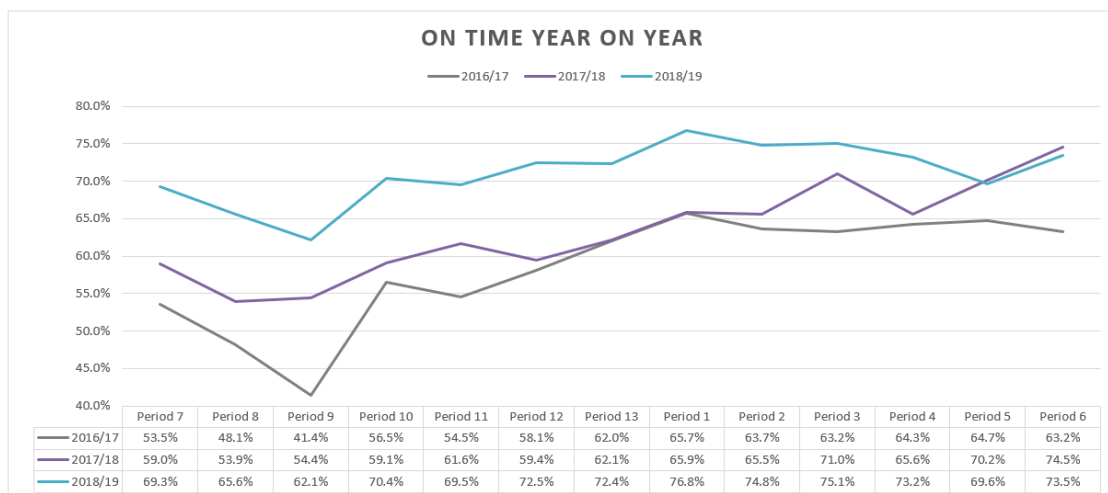


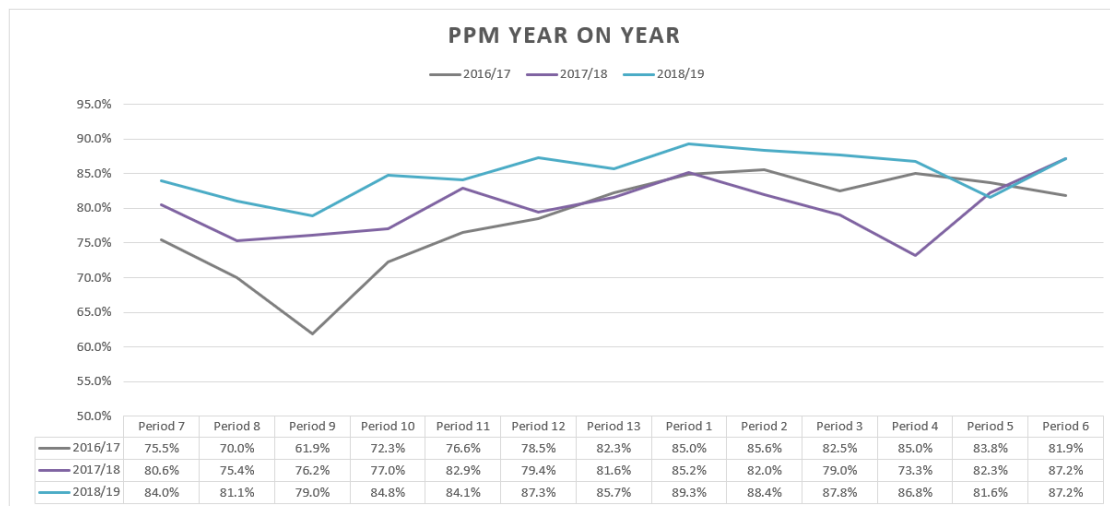
No troublesome software on this beast! UP Big Boy 4004 at Cheyenne last month



The latest performance figures are as follows:

Period 20/06	PPM	On Time
GTR	87.2%	73.5%
Southern	90.3%	75.0%
METRO	91.1%	78.3%
SXC	89.7%	72.2%
<b>Gatwick Express</b>	81.4%	62.3%
<b>Great Northern</b>	81.1%	74.0%
GN INNER	83.9%	81.6%
GN OUTER	77.0%	57.7%
<b>Thameslink</b>	85.2%	71.5%
TL BML	80.2%	62.8%
TL ECML	76.1%	55.8%
TL KENT	85.9%	72.1%
TL MML	86.3%	73.0%
TL S LNDN	92.5%	81.9%





## 6. 2020 Fare Increase

The Government recently announced that rail fares will increase by 2.8% from January 2020. They still continue to use the RPI Index when calculating the increase instead of the lower CPI figure. We would urge all members to contact their MP to complain about the increase and the continued use of the RPI figure.

## 7. December 2019 Timetable Change

There are no changes to the Thameslink or East Midlands Railway timetables that would affect Bedford or Flitwick travellers. However, as reported earlier in this newsletter the major changes to the East Midlands Railway timetable will be from December 2020. We will be in consultation with EMR regarding the major changes proposed over the next few months.

## 8. Bromham Road Bridge

We have been advised by Thameslink that 200 car parking spaces will be taken out of use at Bedford Station from Monday 21<sup>st</sup> October for up to 9 weeks to allow Network Rail to demolish and rebuild the Bromham Road Bridge. Please refer to the last newsletter for details of alternative parking arrangements during this period.

A reminder for members at Bedford who hold an annual season ticket for the car park:

In response to the BCA regarding compensation to car park season ticket holders Thameslink have stated: "Annual car park season permit holders will have their permits extended by nine weeks to compensate. This offer will be open to customers with annual permits valid only for the full nine weeks. This reflects the fact that many people will have already bought tickets that span the period."

For more information, see our website - [www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk](http://www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk)

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

This newsletter is published by the Bedford Commuters Association.