



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

WELCOME to the December 2006 Newsletter of Bedford Commuters Association.

1. Seasons Greetings

On behalf of the Chairman and the Committee we would like to wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

2. Committee Members

As we reported in our last Newsletter, the BCA are in dire need of new committee members. If you feel that you have something to contribute and would like to help us improve the rail travelling environment then please contact the Chairman, Arthur Taylor, on 01525 715454.

3. BCA : Attendance at Various Meetings

FCC. We met with the FCC timetable planners in late September to discuss future timetables. We have asked that more, faster, limited stop services be introduced, fast from/to Kings Cross from Luton and more stops at West Hampstead on other services. We fully understand that enhancements to services in the peak cannot take place until all 86 Class 319 electric units are with FCC. We were informed that from December 2006, FCC will re-open the Cricklewood carriage sidings for berthing electric trains overnight and during the day. This is a result of train maintenance being moved from Selhurst (South London) to Hornsey (North London). Whilst at Cricklewood light maintenance/fault finding will be undertaken, along with carriage cleaning. We will monitor this to ensure that cleaning is done and the quality of heavy maintenance being undertaken at Hornsey in place of Selhurst is to a high standard.

MML. The BCA met with Garry Raven (the new Managing Director MML), Simon Taylor (Timetable Planner) and Emma Knight (Head of External Communications) on October 18th. We congratulated them on winning the Train Operator of the Year Award, and thanked them for the continuing good performance and reliability of their trains. They reported that the December 2006 timetable changes were minimal on weekdays. The only change is an additional train at 21.30 from St.Pancras to Nottingham which will call at all MML stations including Bedford. As a result of this the 23.15 train will become a 4-car working. On Sundays there are many changes which will result in a half hourly service from Bedford to London and the North all day, which is a big improvement over current service levels. The BCA will continue to press MML for additional trains in the weekday peaks. MML are trialling a 5-car Meridian; if successful, they will convert a further 6 x 4-car Meridians to 5-car - by taking out one car from each of the 9 car sets. This should then improve the overcrowding on many 4-car services which is being experienced at present. All in all, a very positive meeting. A great pity that FCC cannot find such a solution to strengthen their 4-car Class 319s!

Passenger Focus. The BCA, along with other Rail User Groups using FCC services north of the Thames, attended a meeting in the Houses of Parliament on 25th October to discuss the peak travel restrictions introduced by FCC last June. Many MPs were in attendance. All the User Groups present agreed that the restrictions should be removed and the problem of overcrowding solved by additional rolling stock, not by suppressing demand and maximising fare revenue! It was agreed that further pressure should be applied to FCC by Passenger Focus and by MPs (through the Secretary of State for Transport and the DfT). We will keep you updated on this important subject.

4. Class 319 Electric Trains.

Class 319 “Refresh” On 26th October the Chairman and some of the BCA Committee were invited to the naming of the first refreshed Class 319 at Bedford Station by Elaine Holt, the MD of FCC, followed by a run to Brighton and back on the unit. We were invited to give our views on the work undertaken. £27m. has been allocated for the refresh and we can report that the money provided (we would actually have preferred more) has been well spent and a relatively good job done. Briefly the changes are: new lino flooring, better lighting, new luggage racks (adjacent to the doors), new seat covers, new handrails/grab handles, a brighter interior finish, easier access to toilets, and new toilet fittings. To provide luggage stacks and better access to the toilets, a few seats have had to be removed. There have also been changes to the train to improve mechanical & electrical systems/equipment and maintenance arrangements, which should hopefully lead to them being more reliable in service.

Southern Class 319s. The long drawn-out saga of the remaining 13 Class 319s held by Southern TOC rolls on. FCC have informed the BCA that a further unit has now become available from Southern which will operate from the new timetable, starting on 11th December, thereby providing an additional 300 seats in the morning and evening peak. The BCA continues to press FCC and lobby MPs for the return of all the remaining 319s (see recent article in “Beds On Sunday” regarding Patrick Hall M.P.’s meeting with the Transport Minister).

5. East Midlands Franchise.

The BCA has recently attended a “Roadshow” by National Express (current holders of the MML Franchise). They gave a very good presentation and asked for comments from the assembled stakeholders. The BCA reaffirmed its view that no changes should be made to the current timetable from Bedford: i.e. 2 trains per hour to London and to Leicester and the north.

A further meeting will take place in early December where all four short-listed bidders (National Express, Arriva, Stagecoach and First Group) will each give a presentation and be subject to a ‘question and answer’ session. A report in the next Newsletter will be provided.

6. St.Pancras Station - the “Thameslink Box”.

All hoarding within the ‘Box’ has been removed and if you look you will be able to see the work of “fitting out” taking place. We understand that a separate ticket office for FCC will be built, so a combined MML/FCC ticket office will not be provided. MML already has a new “Domestic” ticket office, which opened along with their four “new” platforms. Whilst the provision of a separate new FCC ticket office for the “Box” station is welcomed, it is somewhat curious that facilities will not be shared with MML – economies of scale lost!

Recently it was announced that “Eurostar” trains will operate from St Pancras International from Wednesday 14th November 2007 and the new FCC station in the “Box” is still on target to open a month later. Kent Domestic and Olympic “Javelin” services will follow later, in the main St. Pancras station; no dates have yet been announced for the introduction of these.

No details are available of when the connections to/from the GN route of FCC, will be put in place north of the “Thameslink Box” station. It is ultimately the intention (under the “Thameslink Programme”) that both the GN & Thameslink routes will serve this new station. East Bedfordshire stations will then have access to the through cross-London route.

7. December 2006 Timetable Changes.

FCC An additional service is to be provided in the morning peak. This train will depart Bedford at 05.56 for Moorgate calling at Flitwick, Luton, Harpenden, St Albans, Kings Cross, Farringdon, Barbican and arriving Moorgate at 06.59. As a result of the additional 319 unit from Southern becoming available, the 07.58 Bedford to Sutton will become an 8-car train. In the evening the 16.50 Wimbledon to St Albans also becomes an 8-car train.

MML As mentioned earlier, an Additional train from St Pancras to Nottingham at 21.30 calling at Luton, Bedford and stations to Nottingham. As a result of the additional 21.30, the

23.15 from St Pancras will become 4-car only. A recast of the Sunday timetable means that Bedford will receive a half hourly service to London and the North throughout the day.

8. Peak Travel Restrictions.

FCC have informed the BCA that over the Christmas period, from Christmas Eve to the New Year, the peak travel restrictions will be lifted.

9. Thameslink Project.

The DfT recently announced that the outstanding planning permissions and the Transport & Works Act powers for the Thameslink Project ("Thameslink 2000") have been agreed. This is very good news. However, the funding for the project has still to be agreed. The BCA will continue to lobby via our MPs for the funding to be agreed and the scheme to be implemented in full. The BCA will be attending a "Thameslink 2000 Consortium" Meeting of all stakeholders in late January 2007 and will report back in our next Newsletter on any news and developments.

The BCA would strongly suggest that members contact their MP with a view to applying pressure on the Secretary of State for Transport for full funding for the scheme.

10. Bedford Town Centre Study.

A transport & planning consultancy, Faber Maunsell, has been appointed by the local authorities & *Renaissance Bedford* to work on a study to investigate the potential for improving traffic and environmental conditions in Bedford Town Centre. As part of any recommendations, public transport accessibility to the town centre may be improved. The BCA will be pressing for bus services to be radically improved to/from the railway station. One sensible suggestion for early implementation is that the "Elstow Park & Ride" bus service is extended to run to/from the railway station. A further longer-term possibility is that the present station entrance/exit, ticket office and other facilities are re-located further south towards the Ford End Road/Midland Road. The BCA are still mindful that an entrance/exit to the station from Platform 4 towards Hurst Grove & Queen's Park would be very sensible. Many other stations along the "Thameslink" route are double-sided (Leagrave, Harpenden, St. Albans, etc.). Development in the "Biddenham Loop" and regeneration in Queen's Park, suggest that access to/from the station on the west side will be essential in the future.

The station will almost certainly be re-modelled and 12-car length platforms provided as part of the "Thameslink Programme". Additionally a new platform 5 may be added on the back-face of the present platform 4 (the northbound MML platform). Hence any new station entrance/exit on the Queen's Park side of the station would have to take this into account and it might therefore involve an extension to the footbridge, a new lift and a "gated" barrier line. Sadly the local authority did not enforce a Section 106 Agreement with the developer of the adjacent housing, which would have ensured that the necessary facilities were provided!

11. The Wixams.

The BCA will report any developments in respect of the proposed new station at this location, in connection with the township to be built on the former Elstow Ordnance Depot site. It is unlikely that MML services will call, if a station is constructed near to Chimney Corner. However, FCC and also possibly East-West services (at a lower-level station) may call.

12. FCC Station Improvement Plans.

Various improvements are proposed at both Bedford & Flitwick stations during 2007. Work at Bedford will include a new Help Point, 17 new CCTV cameras, a refurbishment of the toilets (again!), painting of the station, new 37" information screens, additional information poster sites, improved signage, installation of automatic doors (near the barrier-line) and improved staff accommodation.

At Flitwick 9 new CCTV cameras are to be provided, new waiting shelters, new platform canopies, the installation of additional information posters, sites to improve customer service,

new vending machines, a new retail coffee kiosk and painting of the station.

13. Station Car Parks.

FCC have changed the car park management from Meteor (a Go-Via subsidiary) to NCP at both Bedford & Flitwick.

In Flitwick the latest (Autumn 2006) edition of the local Conservative Party Newsletter was circulated on a household-drop/ mailing over the weekend of 11th/12th November. The Newsletter contained an item in respect of "Commuter (Car) Parking" in the town:

"The survey (undertaken by Bedfordshire Highways - County Council/Amey), as previously reported, has now been completed and it has fully confirmed the problems we all see. The County Council will now develop a range of potential actions to reduce this *scourge* of Flitwick and will, following pressure from your Councillors, undertake public consultation before the end of the year".

The BCA are naturally concerned at this development and the form of words chosen. Indeed, rather emotive words! The BCA will therefore attempt to ensure that all stakeholders are fully consulted. There is a strong suspicion that an area-wide CPZ (around the railway station) may be the preferred solution, with possible publication of TROs and implementation during 2007. Key questions are : Will adequate resources be allocated to resolve the long-standing parking problems? (Note comparison with road expenditure in County budget : Ridgmont bypass alone, on which work has just started by Birse, is approximately £10.5M per mile). Flitwick still has no proper (off-road) public car parking, unlike Ampthill & Biggleswade. Will "Residents' Parking" be adequately catered for in any adopted scheme? Should BCA members be prepared to object to any likely "Traffic Orders"/Parking Restrictions in proximity to the railway station? What has happened to the comprehensive "Town Centre Redevelopment" proposals, which included the railway station and its car park in Flitwick town centre?

For more information you can access our website - www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk
If there's something you want to tell us about, please e-mail
admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

This newsletter is published by Bedford Commuters Association.