



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 2008 NEWSLETTER

WELCOME to the February 2008 Newsletter of the Bedford Commuters' Association.

1. Membership Renewal – Important Reminder

Members are reminded that the annual subscription became payable last autumn and we would request that Members please ensure that their membership is up to date.

The membership fee has been held at £5. Please remember that the BCA frequently represents the views of its members in local newspapers and broadcast media, as well as our meetings with the Train Operating Companies, Passenger Focus/London TravelWatch, Local Authorities, MPs, etc.

If you think you have had good value from the BCA in the past year, why not suggest to a fellow traveller that they sign up too! The more members we have, the better able we are to influence the policies of the railway companies as the only officially recognised “rail user group” for passengers travelling on EMT and FCC services.

Subscriptions are payable to the John MacLeod, BCA Membership Secretary, 12 Willmers Close, Bedford, MK41 8DX (enclosing an SAE please).

2. Communication - email or snail mail?

The majority of members have provided the BCA with an email address so we can communicate quickly, smartly, and “greenly”. Distributing this Newsletter by email saves the BCA on postage and paper, helping to keep subscriptions down and, moreover, means we can inform members quickly of new developments, such as the fare changes in late December. If you receive this edition in paper form, it means we either have no email address or one that is not recognised - if that is the case, please let Jim Allwood know (on jim.allwood@ntlworld.com) so he can update his distribution list. Many thanks.

3. Stagecoach East Midlands Trains (EMT)

The proposed East Midlands Trains timetable from December 2008 has recently been circulated to stakeholders in draft form. The BCA have serious reservations about the level of services to be provided at Bedford, especially northbound to the East Midlands. Members may like to refer to the recent article on page 6 of “Rail Manager On-Line” : ‘Controversial timetable changes in December are causing anger’ (See : RMOL Edition 131 11th February 2008, Website : www.keepingtrack.co.uk/railmanager).

The BCA are aware that there have been similar pieces in other rail magazines recently. We know Northamptonshire County Council Officers and Members are making strong representations to East Midlands Trains and Central Government arguing the case for improvements to the rail service for Wellingborough and Kettering, in particular for two trains per hour to Leicester and the north to be retained rather than one per hour as proposed, with the other train terminating at Corby. As yet the BCA are not aware that Bedfordshire County Council have been making similar representations in respect of Bedford, but it is hoped they

will! Patrick Hall MP has lobbied on behalf of rail users, meeting EMT Managing Director, Tim Shoveller, and then following up that meeting with a strongly worded letter.

Arthur Taylor & Andrew Long met with Tim Shoveller and David Horne (Commercial Director) on the 14th January to put the BCA's views on the proposed timetable. Please be assured that the BCA are striving to not just retain the existing train service pattern but to secure further improvements in order to accommodate the growth that is forecast to take place in the Milton Keynes South Midlands (MKSM) area over the next few years. The loss of the present frequency and calling patterns of inter city services at Bedford from December 2008 is not acceptable. However, indications from EMT are that they are not minded to consider a re-cast of services despite our objections!

The Stagecoach EMT proposed service changes from December 2008 will inevitably have a serious knock-on to FCC, certainly in respect of Bedford services, but possibly also Luton too! The 17.30 departure from St. Pancras will no longer call at Bedford, leaving an hour's gap in a fast service from St. Pancras to Bedford between the 17.00 and 18.00 departures in the evening peak.

The BCA will continue to vigorously pursue EMT on this matter, along with other Rail User Groups along the Midland Main Line route. A meeting of interested stakeholders with Passenger Focus & London TravelWatch has been arranged for 27th February.

Members may wish to contact any or all of the following in order to lend weight to the campaign for improved rail services:

East Midlands Trains Contact email : DHorne@eastmidlandstrains.com
Passenger Focus; Contact email : paul.fullwood@passengerfocus.org.uk

They may also like to contact their respective MPs: Bedford & Kempston – Patrick Hall; North-East Bedfordshire – Alistair Burt. Both MPs are understood to be users of EMT services between Bedford & London.

4. First Capital Connect (FCC)

Members will be kept updated on the Thameslink Programme works beginning this year because they will inevitably cause service disruption, particularly at weekends. Current engineering work at Carlton Road Junction (Kentish Town), in Belsize Tunnel and at Hendon (Aerodrome Way bridge works) sees weekend services affected until the 23rd March. Work will commence in the spring to improve the Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) in the section between Farringdon & Kentish Town. In the autumn a new footbridge will be built at the north end of Farringdon to help ease passenger congestion. Finally, embankment repair works are taking place south of Flitwick.

A further eight Class 319 trains should be with FCC by December 2008, placing the whole fleet under their control. Additionally Network Rail will be carrying out infrastructure improvements to allow Class 377 dual-voltage trains (currently with Southern TOC) to run on the FCC-Thameslink route. The intention is to use the Class 377s on Bedford – Brighton workings and Class 319s on other FCC services. FCC services currently terminating at Moorgate and South Eastern TOC services at Blackfriars will be joined-up, to form new cross-London workings, although most of these will be inner-suburban.

Following the opening of the FCC platforms A & B at St. Pancras International various “snagging” items are being attended to. The lifts have to be brought in to full working order, signing improved and the passenger information displays enhanced by modified software.

At Bedford & Flitwick work also needs to be carried out on the new “Passenger Information System” screens. The large summary screens require attention, along with tuning for brightness & clarity. The BCA would welcome member feedback on the clarity of the screens. The poor siting of the screen at Bedford has been pointed out to FCC as it is

causing congestion on the concourse! The car park ticket machines should shortly be upgraded with new software, so that correct prices are displayed. New cycle parking has been provided and has quickly filled-up!

FCC have been requested to re-consider their deletion of Rail User Group details from their "pocket timetables"; hopefully future editions may see the details of the BCA (& other RUGs) reinstated.

5. Car Parking - Flitwick

Despite the BCA's objections, restrictions on waiting were introduced in January by Bedfordshire County Council (as highway authority) for various roads around Flitwick Station, including Temple Way, Eagle Drive & elsewhere. Whilst these aimed at reducing parking congestion by commuters in certain residential areas, they have also caused serious problems for local residents. Whilst indiscriminate parking may have been curbed, the application of the TROs and yellow-lining leaves much to be desired and questions have been raised as to whether the restrictions actually conform to the DfT's guidance in their "Manual for Streets". There are also road safety issues near junctions and where there are footways.

If Members have been affected by these changes, it is suggested that they contact the Portfolio Holder for Transport at County Hall, Councillor Tom Wootton.

6. Flitwick Town Centre Development

Following the public consultation last November/December, Mid Beds District Council is now analysing the responses. The BCA believe that there has been overwhelming support for improvements to the railway station and station car park. Indeed most respondents favour a new station building fit for purpose in the 21st Century. The proposal for a new Station Square and bus/rail interchange, multi-storey station car park and a new pedestrian/cycle bridge was also welcomed. Many stakeholders are in favour of a larger multi-storey car park with more spaces than originally intended, particularly given housing growth in the area and the implications of the "Thameslink Programme" improvements. A word of caution has, however, been mentioned in respect of the proposed bus/rail interchange, given the on-going financial reductions in bus service support by the County Council. The future of the County Council is also in doubt given the likely outcome of a decision on unitary status by Hazel Blears, the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government.

For more information visit : www.talktomidbeds.co.uk

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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 admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

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